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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 21 MARCH 2026 | SATURDAY | BENGALURU | 01 SHAWWAL 1447 H | Vol 5 | Issue No 70 | Pages: 10

Salar Digital English Daily wishes its readers a very happy Eid ul-Fitr. Our office will remain closed on 21 March, 2026, and there will be no edition dated 22 March.

'DHURANDHAR 2' MAKES RECORD RS 145 CR ON DAY 1

MUMBAI, 20 MARCH

Aditya Dhar's 'Dhurandhar 2', starring Ranveer Singh as an undercover spy in Pakistan, has broken many records to deliver one of the biggest openings in Indian cinema with an estimated earning of over Rs 100 crore on the first day of its release.

The film earned over Rs 43 crore from paid previews on Wednesday, the highest ever for an Indian film, and Rs 102.55 crore on its opening day on Thursday, bringing its total India earnings to around Rs 145 crore, according to early estimates by trade tracking website Sacnilk.

The film has already surpassed the opening day numbers of recent Hindi blockbusters -- Shah Rukh Khan's 'Jawan' (Rs 75 crore) and 'Pathaan' (Rs 57 crore) as well as horror-comedy 'Stree 2' (Rs 54 crore).

The worldwide collection of the movie is expected to cross the figure of Rs 200 crore given the buzz surrounding the release of the second part after the massive success of 'Dhurandhar'.

It is expected to surpass the success of the first 'Dhurandhar', which earned Rs 1,300 crore worldwide.

Produced by Jyoti Deshpande and Lokesh Dhar, the sequel charts Mazari's rise in the Karachi underworld while tracing the origins of the man behind the cover. —*PTI*

Industrial diesel, top grade petrol get pricey

No change in normal petrol, diesel rates as West Asia war rages on

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The price of premium or higher-grade petrol on Friday was increased by Rs 2 per litre while the rate of bulk diesel sold to industrial users was hiked by about Rs 22 a litre, reflecting the spike in global oil prices amid conflict in West Asia.

However, the prices of normal petrol and diesel remain unchanged.

Premium 95-Octane petrol price in Delhi has been increased from Rs 99.89 per litre to Rs 101.89 per litre, industry sources said.

Alongside, bulk or industrial diesel prices were hiked from Rs 87.67 per litre to Rs 109.59 per litre in Delhi. Commercial diesel is used by establishments such as telecom towers to meet power requirements.

Pricing decisions, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas said, are taken by oil companies independently as petrol and diesel pricing was deregulated in 2010 and 2014, respectively. "Government does not regulate petrol and diesel prices," she added.

International oil prices touched USD 119 per barrel on Thursday on the intensifying Iran war, before pulling back to around USD 108 a barrel.

Normal petrol typically has an octane rating of 91-92 and is suitable for standard engines, offering adequate performance for everyday driving.

Premium petrol, on the other hand, has a higher octane rating of 95-98, making it ideal for high-performance or high-compression engines.

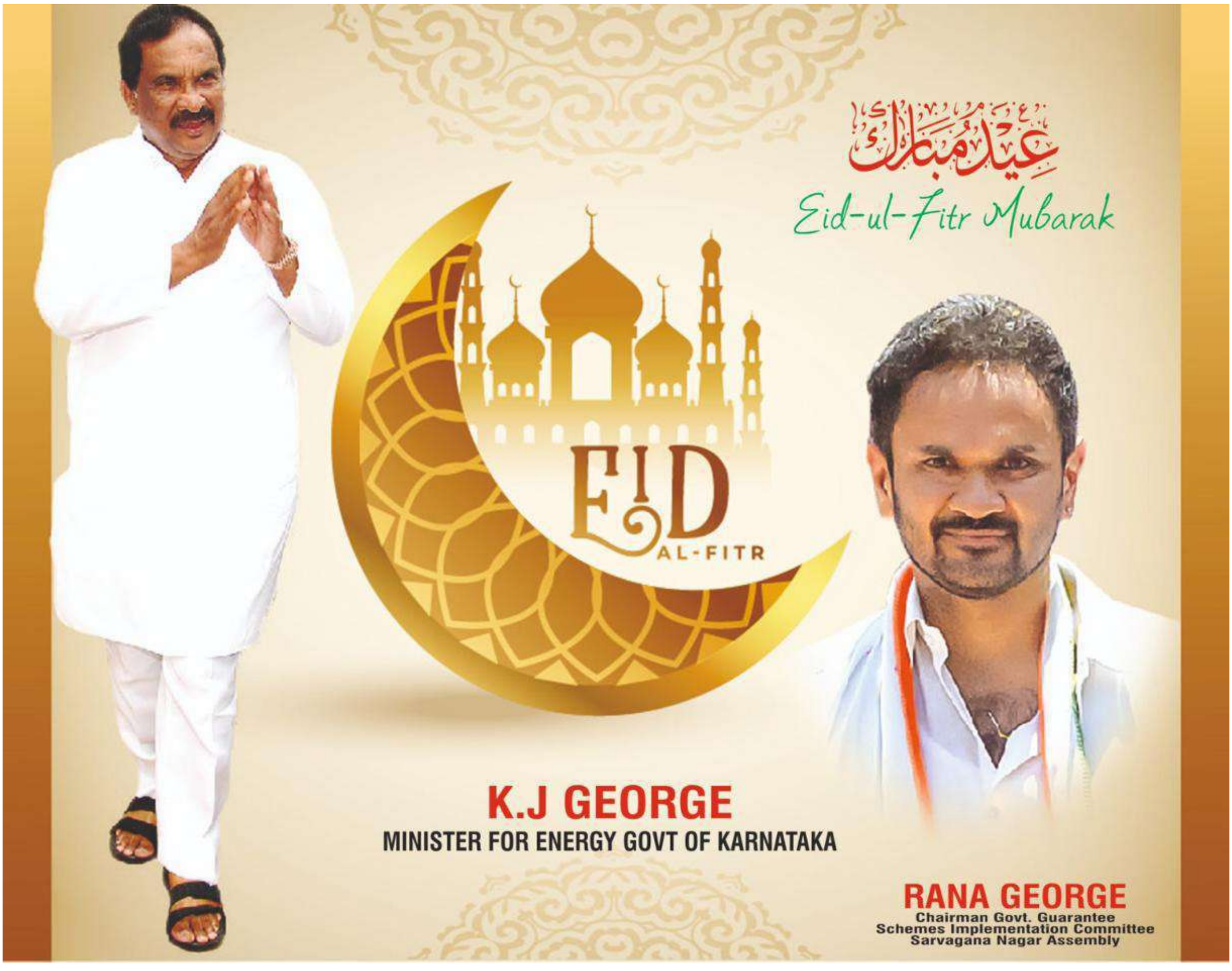
Meanwhile, the aviation watchdog Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Thursday asked airlines to avoid airspaces near Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar and United Arab Emirates (UAE), ensure robust contingency plans as part of safety risk assessments. —*PTI*

More on pages 4, 7, 8, 9, 10

- Premium 95-Octane petrol price in Delhi has been increased from Rs 99.89 per litre to Rs 101.89 per litre, industry sources said. Bulk or industrial diesel prices were hiked from Rs 87.67 to Rs 109.59 per litre

6 INDIANS HAVE DIED IN WEST ASIA: MEA

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Friday said six Indian nationals have lost their lives while one remains missing in "various incidents". The MEA said that an Indian national was killed during an attack in Riyadh on 18 March, but didn't elaborate. Meanwhile, Ranchi-based Captain Rakesh Ranjan died on board a merchant vessel carrying oil near the Strait of Hormuz, his family said on Friday, urging the Centre and the Jharkhand government to help bring back his body. They claimed the ship had been stranded about 14 nautical miles off the Strait of Hormuz since 28 February, after movement was halted in the region.



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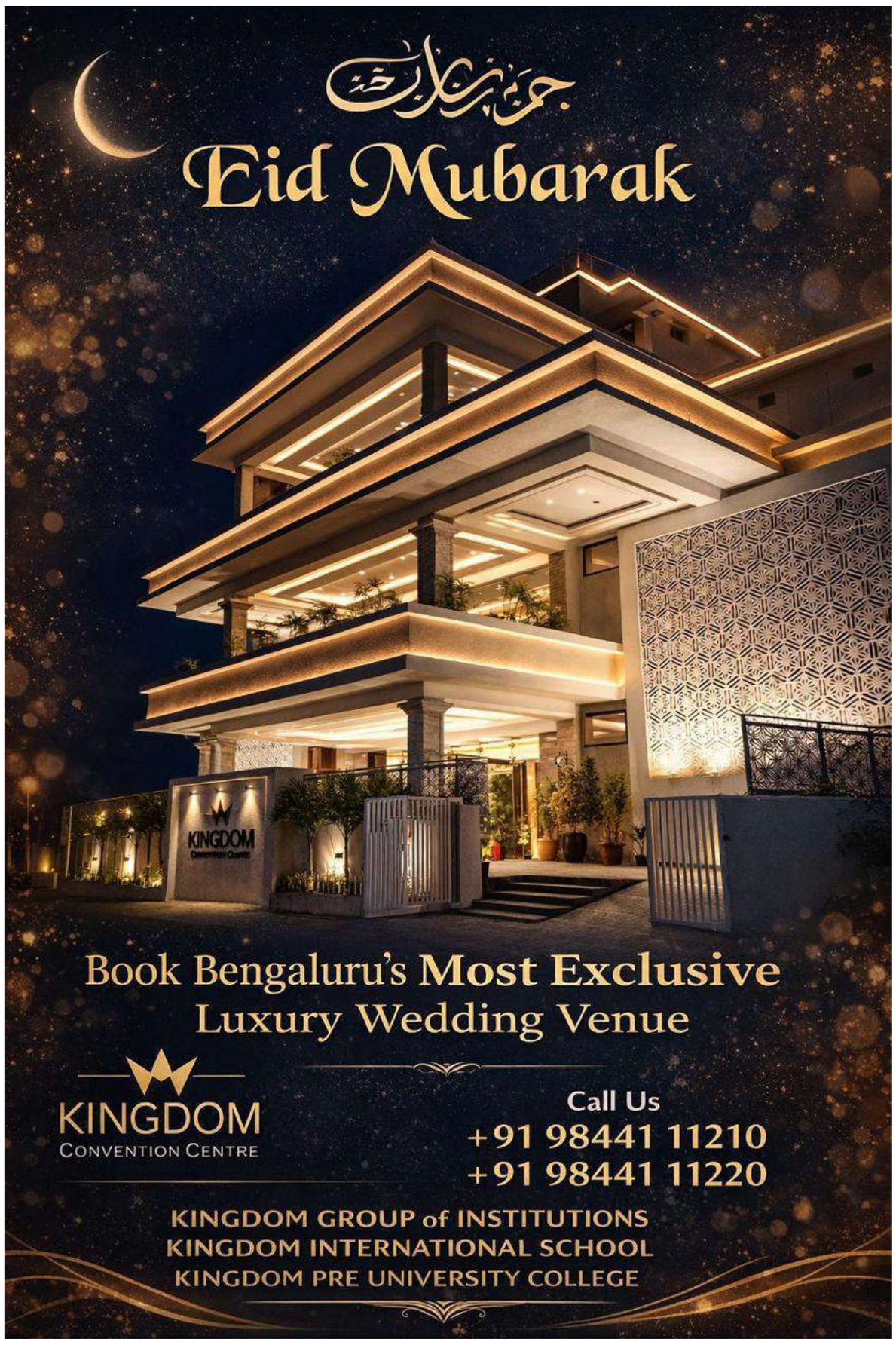
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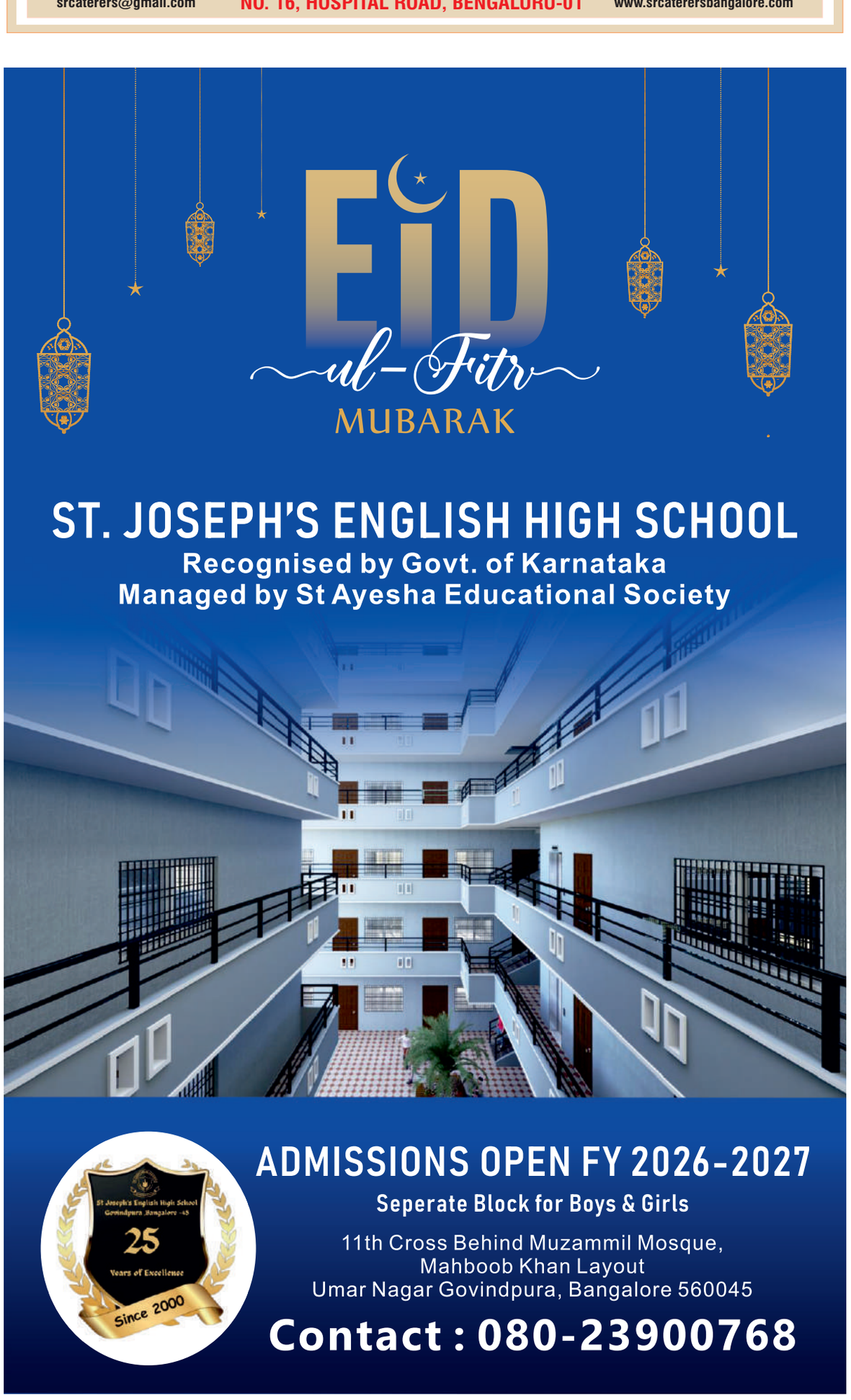
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India-China trade via Lipulekh soon

Crossing via Tibet was shut in 2019

PITHORAGARH, 20 MARCH

Border trade between India and China through the Lipulekh Pass in Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district is set to resume this year after a six-year hiatus.

Border trade with Tibet via the Lipulekh had resumed in 1992 after a long suspension of the same. However, it was again halted in 2019 due to the Covid-19 pandemic and was a flashpoint during the 2020 Ladakh tensions.

The reopening is part of a broader push by both sides to restore economic activity, rebuild people-to-people links, and stabilise relations along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Following directives from the Union government, preparations have begun for the trade session, which typically runs from June to September. The move comes after a No Objection Certificate (NOC) was issued by the Ministry of External Affairs, District Magistrate Ashish Bhatgai said.

To facilitate the session, instructions have been given to the authorities issuing trade passes, designated banks for currency exchange, the Customs Department and the Dharchula administration to prepare a detailed action plan. This includes arrangements for transit camps, communication, banking services, security and medical facilities for traders. *—PTI*

SC refuses to stop BMC from axing 45K mangroves

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Friday declined to interfere with the Bombay High Court order which permitted the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) to remove over 45,000 mangroves for the Versova-Bhayander road project in North Mumbai.

While approximately 60,000 mangroves fall in the influence zone of the Mumbai Coastal Road (North) project, around 45,000 are being impacted. Of these, around 9,000 mangroves will be permanently cut.

The apex court directed the BMC to submit annual reports to the high court on compensatory afforestation and the restoration of mangroves.

A three-judge bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi said the proposed road will have a "significant and beneficial impact" on the general public by decongesting western highway.

Senior advocate Chander Uday Singh, appearing for NGO Vanashakti, argued that the BMC took the high court's permission by showing an earlier afforestation, a charge denied by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta. *—PTI*

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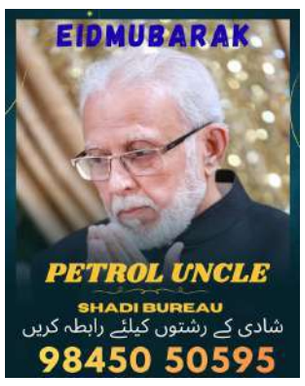
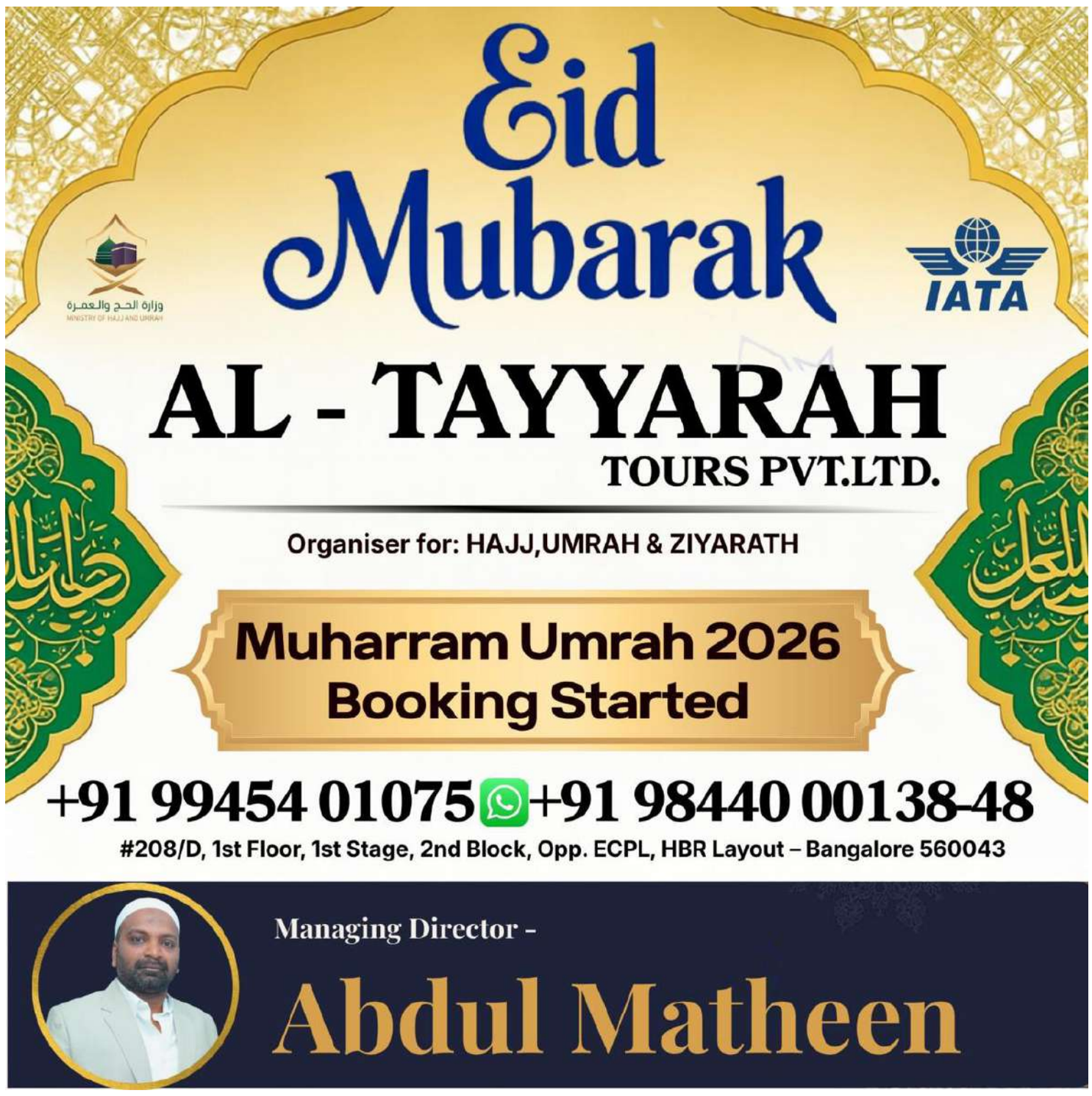




Congress Muslim leaders demand Davangere South bypoll ticket

BENGALURU, 20 MARCH

Senior Congress Muslim legislators including Tanveer Sait and Naseer Ahmed on Friday put up a strong pitch before AICC General Secretary Karnataka in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala to give the Davangere South assembly bypoll ticket to the community.

Surjewala was in Bengaluru to hold discussions with Congress State President and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on candidates for Davangere South and Bagalkot Assembly seats, to which the byelections will be held on 9 April. The vacancies were caused following the deaths of sitting MLAs Shamnur S Shivashankarappa from Davangere South and HY Meti from Bagalkot. The last date for filing the nomination papers is 23 March.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had promised the families of Shivashankarappa and Meti that the tickets would be given to them.

Muslims have been demanding Davangere South seat as there are nearly 70,000 minority votes of the total 2,32,564 electorate. The demand by Muslims for the ticket has been consistent since 2008 when Davangere South and North constituencies were carved out in the delimitation exercise. High drama prevailed during the 2008 assembly polls for Davangere North seat, resulting in the Congress not contesting the seat as the nomination papers of the official candidate was rejected.

In 2008, Congress had flown the requisite 'B' form from Bengaluru to Davangere by helicopter at the last minute to hand it over to the official candidate, Syed Saifullah. As the late Shivashankarappa was contesting from Davangere South, he wanted the Davangere North ticket for his son SS Mallikarjun, who is a minister in Siddaramaiah's cabinet now. Reportedly under duress, Saifullah himself struck out his name in the 'B' form and wrote Mallikarjun's, which was invalidated during scrutiny of the nomination papers.

Meanwhile, Congress functionary MT Subhash Chandra has written a letter to Congress leader Sonia Gandhi recalling the 2008 incident where the party had to go without a candidate. In the letter, he has mentioned how Shivashankarappa's daughter-in-law Prabha Mallikarjun could get elected from Davangere Lok Sabha seat with the help of three lakh Muslim votes in 2024. "Due to this historical background, we are demanding that the ticket be given to party MLC K Abdul Jabbar," he added.

"If the ticket is denied to a Muslim candidate this time and given to Shivashankarappa's grandson Samarth Shivashankarappa, there will be strong resentment from the community and other backward classes, who constitute 80 per cent of the voters," Chandra said. Meanwhile, Samarth entered the fray even before the Congress announced the official candidate by filing his nomination papers on Friday. He filed the papers as an Independent candidate without the requisite 'B' form. The BJP playing on the AHINDA votes has fielded Srinivas T Dasakariyappa, a Nayak. —*Salar News*

New Mangalore Port waives cargo charges amid war

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The Shipping Ministry announced that New Mangalore Port has waived cargo-related charges for crude oil and LPG from 14 to 31 March, with no congestion reported at any port. Special Secretary Rajesh Kumar Sinha stated that all 22 Indian ships and 611 sailors in the Persian Gulf are safe amid the ongoing West Asia conflict. He added, "There has been no report of any maritime incident in the last 24 hours. All our 22 ships and 611 Indian sailors in the Persian Gulf region are safe, and we are continuously monitoring them... There is no congestion in any port... New Mangalore Port has issued a circular for waiver of all cargo-related charges for crude and LPG, valid from 14 March to 31 March. The war in West Asia continued into Friday, with no signs of easing. —*ANI*

Bride goes missing two weeks after wedding

CHINTAMANI, 20 MARCH

In a bizarre incident in Gownicheruvupalli under Batlahalli police limits, a newly married bride went missing after two weeks of marriage, allegedly taking some jewels gifted by the groom. The groom, Bhaskar of Madanapalli, who works in Bengaluru, lodged a police complaint after his wife, Nethra, 24 of Kotlapalli near Marganapalli, disappeared on the 15th of this month. Bhaskar said, "As I was looking for a bride, the three brokers, including a relative, hurriedly arranged the marriage, claiming she would marry someone else if not done quickly." It was later revealed that Nethra was already married with two children and had undergone a tubectomy. Bhaskar returned home and reported her missing. Shivakumar, Gownicheruvupalli Police Sub Inspector said there is no mention about the missing jewels in the complaint, but Bhaskar has been claiming orally that Nethra has taken jewels with her. —*SALAR NEWS*

Art Park to host 'Meet the Artists' event in Mysuru

MYSURU, 20 MARCH

The Art Park will organise its first 'Meet the Artists' event in Mysuru on 22 March, from 11am to 5pm at Heritage House. Organised with Bharath Hospital and Institute of Oncology, the event offers art lovers a chance to witness live art demonstrations and exhibitions in a heritage setting. Bhagya Ajaikumar, President of The Art Park and Founder of Swasti Contemporary Art Gallery in the City, is spearheading the initiative. She stated, "This is the first time we are conducting the event in Mysuru. Renowned artists are expected to participate, providing opportunities for budding artists to interact with established names and gain exposure." Ajaikumar, a promoter of national and international artists, has been fostering artistic exchange through monthly events at Bengaluru since 2014. —*SALAR NEWS*

SC bins plea alleging CM was threatening citizen

Petitioner says Siddaramaiah was trying to steal property

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Friday declined to entertain a petition that alleged Chief Minister Siddaramaiah orchestrated threats to capture a property.

The counsel representing the petitioner informed a bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta that the petitioner was unable to enter Karnataka and had been forced to live in Delhi.

"Is the Karnataka Chief Minister sending people after you in Delhi?" the bench inquired. The counsel responded, "Not in Delhi; it is in Karnataka."

The lawyer explained that the petitioner wished to return to Karnataka. "Despite filing repeated police complaints and obtaining court orders in my favour, the threats continue," he argued.

The lawyer also claimed that in January, there was an incident of stone pelting at the property, and some individuals vandalised it. "They want to capture the property," the counsel claimed.

The bench questioned why the petitioner had not approached the jurisdictional High Court. The lawyer responded, "The problem is that because of these threats, I am unable to enter the state of Karnataka. I am forced to live in Delhi."

The bench then referred to a committee and asked whether the petitioner was heading it.

The Supreme Court commented that the petitioner seemed to be engaged in a "political battle" in court. The counsel noted that the petitioner was not politically inclined at all.

After the bench showed its disinclination to entertain the plea filed by two persons, the counsel sought permission to withdraw it.

The plea was dismissed as withdrawn, leaving it open for the petitioners to avail themselves of remedies before the jurisdictional High Court. —*PTI*

COPS SAY HE DIED OF FEAR

Tumakuru tense after 'custodial death'

TUMAKURU, 20 MARCH

A 45-year-old man detained on charges of gambling died under suspicious circumstances at Huliyaru police station in Tumakuru district on Friday, triggering protests by family members and villagers who alleged that it was a custodial death.

The State government has transferred the case to the CID due to the claims of custodial torture. The deceased, Kantaraju from Yalanadu village, was among six people who were arrested late on Thursday.

Police said he died when leaving the police station, but the exact cause is not yet known.

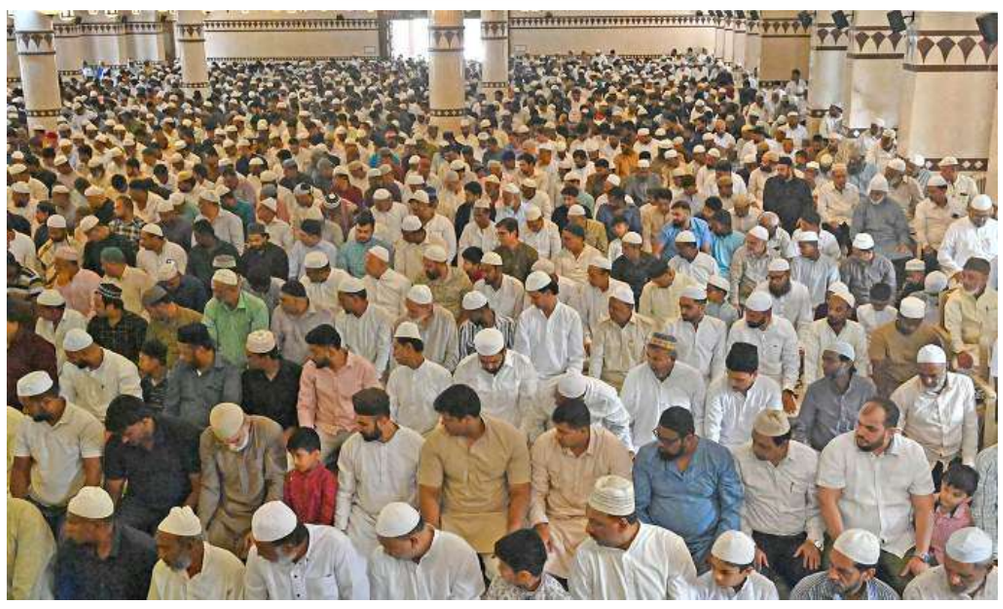
Huliyaru police station Inspector PR Janardhan said that a case of "natural death in the station" has been registered pending the post-mortem report. He said the detained individuals had been brought in for allegedly playing cards and maintained that no police personnel used force. "No one laid hands on him. It is possible that Kantaraju suffered a heart attack due to fear," the inspector said.

However, family members accused the police of assaulting Kantaraju, thereby causing death. They placed the body inside the police station and demanded strict action against police personnel.

Home Minister G Parameshwara said a post-mortem report is awaited to ascertain the exact cause of death.

"Things will be clear from the CID probe if he was beaten," he stated. —*Salar News*

EID MUBARAK



Muslims attend the last Friday prayers (Jumat-ul-Vida) in the holy month of Ramadan at Khadria Masjid on Millers Road, in Bengaluru, on the eve of Eid ul-Fitr *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

CM writes to Puri over LPG crisis

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah wrote to Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, seeking urgent intervention to tackle the severe shortage of commercial LPG.

Sharing a letter dated 18 March on his X on Friday, Siddaramaiah claimed that State is currently receiving just 1,000 cylinders per day against a demand of around 50,000.

"As a result, there has been a visible increase in shutting down of establishments," he wrote. "This is beginning to impact the students, IT professionals, farmers, dairy producers along with a large section of the public which are dependent on the hospitality sector."

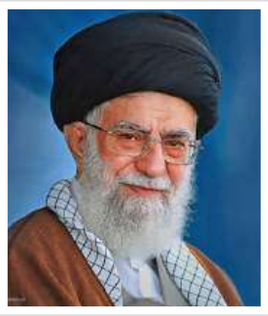
He noted that while there is an existing IT system to monitor the domestic gas supply, there is no integrated platform available for monitoring the commercial supplies.

> **Today, the Indian rupee has fallen to 93 rupees to a dollar, but the BJP, Prime Minister Modi and their government remains on a mute mode. Ordinary households, small dhabas and restaurants, and small eateries feel the crisis today... At this price, we will have to employ a security guard to protect every cylinder in India**
>
> -Randeep Singh Surjewala, AICC General Secretary

"Similarly, Auto LPG is a critical fuel for a large number of auto-rickshaws, which form an important part of the City's last-mile connectivity and support the livelihood of many drivers," he wrote. "However, there is no integrated system to monitor the distribution of Auto LPG, which leads to lack of transparency and accountability."

"I have requested immediate allocation support," he said. —*Salar News with Agencies*

The war in West Asia has forced dozens of eateries to close across Karnataka —*MOHAMMED ASAD*



Shias in C'ballapur village to have mellow Eid

GAURIBIDANUR, 20 MARCH

Shia Muslims in Chikkaballapur's Alipura village will observe Eid-ul-Fitr as usual but will not perform the customary act of celebrating in new clothes as a mark of respect for the late Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the former supreme leader of Iran, who was killed in the ongoing Iran-US war.

Abbas, a merchant in the village, said the community would offer prayers, perform rituals and exchange fruits, sweets, and flowers with Hindu neighbours as a symbol of communal harmony. Muslims will wear black cloth on their shoulders and forearms, he added.

Located approximately 90 km from Bengaluru, Alipura is a Shia-dominated village. Khamenei visited Alipura in 1986, strengthening ties. —*Salar News*

Govt floats tender for 2nd int'l airport in B'luru

BENGALURU, 20 MARCH

Karnataka Infrastructure Minister MB Patil on Friday said that the government has floated a tender to prepare a detailed feasibility and strategy report for a proposed second international airport near Bengaluru.

The State government had shortlisted three locations -- two on Kanakapura Road near Harohalli and one on Kunigal Road in Nelamangala.

Patil said officials of the Airports Authority of India (AAI) have conducted site inspections of three shortlisted locations on the city's outskirts and have flagged several aspects, including challenges associated with these sites.

The Minister said on X that a tender has been floated to prepare a detailed strategy and feasibility report. Three to four firms have participated in the bidding process. Further decisions will be taken based on the reports submitted by these firms, he added.

"After selecting three sites, we called the AAI, and their officials visited all three locations. They pointed out the challenges at each site. To address (this) we have called for a tender," he told reporters here. —*PTI*

Son gets father killed over affair with daughter-in-law

YADGIR, 20 MARCH

In a shocking twist to the Gonal Pampanna murder case, police have revealed that the accused son allegedly plotted his father's killing after discovering his illicit relationships, including one involving his own wife.

Pampanna Sajjan, 75, was murdered in Gonal village on the night of 12 March. His son initially filed a complaint, but investigations later uncovered his role in the crime.

Police arrested four men — Ramesh, G. Viresh, M. Viresh, and Krishna — who carried out the killing. The contract was allegedly given by Narasareddy, the victim's son

Investigators said Narasareddy, enraged over his father's conduct, hired the accused and paid Rs2 lakh to execute the murder. Cops also suspect that there was a property dispute. —*Salar News*

UNFORESEEN TRAGEDY

Trainee-vet killed in hippo attack at Shivamogga zoo

BENGALURU, 20 MARCH

A 26-year-old trainee veterinarian died after being attacked by a hippopotamus while providing the animal with medical care inside its enclosure at the Tavarekoppa Lion and Safari Zoo in Shivamogga, Karnataka.

The deceased, Dr Sameeksha Reddy, who was recently appointed on a contract basis, had gone to treat a wild animal around 11.30 pm on Thursday when she was attacked by the hippopotamus and seriously injured.

She was immediately admitted to a hospital in Shivamogga, but despite treatment, she succumbed to her injuries at around 6.30 am on Friday, Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre said in a statement.

The deceased trainee doctor, Sameeksha Reddy; file photo of hippopotamuses —*x*

The Minister has directed officials to provide compensation to the family of the deceased. Khandre ordered an inquiry into the incident by a team of senior veterinarians and forest officials, with a report to be submitted within seven days.

"May God give strength to the family to bear this loss," Khandre said. —*Salar News*

11 women detained for ruckus in Namma Metro

BENGALURU, 20 MARCH

A group of eleven female passengers was booked for allegedly creating nuisance and disturbing other commuters inside a metro train in the City, police said on Friday. The incident occurred on the night of 15 March when they were travelling from Bengaluru International Exhibition Centre to Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Metro Station, they said.

The group allegedly started singing loudly inside the coach, leading to objections from other commuters.

Later, at Peenya Industrial Area station in the City, some passengers alighted and continued arguing on the platform, briefly preventing the train doors from closing, a senior police officer said.

Following the incident, security personnel intervened and brought the situation under control, he said. The same group allegedly created nuisance at several stations. Metro security staff and home guards identified and detained those involved at different points, with support from Hoysala patrol teams, police said.

Based on a complaint by a BMRCL Security Officer, a non-cognisable report was filed against the eleven passengers.

However, they were later let off after apologising for their actions, police added. —*PTI*

—ANI

Under house arrest & barred from prayers: Mirwaiz

SRINAGAR, 20 MARCH

Kashmir's chief priest Mirwaiz Umar Farooq said he was placed under house arrest and prevented from offering Friday prayers at Jamia Masjid. He stated, "For the third consecutive Friday in Ramzan I have been put under arbitrary house arrest — never conveyed in writing, but enforced by police vehicles and contingents, blocking traffic and sealing lanes with concertina wires to stop me delivering the sermon." He posted pictures of security forces outside his residence in Nigeen. Mirwaiz added, "While it conveys panic of the rulers, the centrality of Jama Masjid has always been a thorn in their side, but such measures cannot erase identity or weaken faith. These will fail."—*PTI*

No Cong MP to contest Kerala Assembly polls

Rahul says people of Kerala are ready for change under UDF

NEW DELHI/T'PURAM, 20 MARCH

Determined to take on the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) in the 9 April Kerala Assembly polls, the Congress on Thursday banked on its state leadership to see it through, deciding against fielding any of its MPs.

The party braved internal pressures to take the policy decision of banking on its Kerala leadership rather than sending parliamentarians to fight Assembly polls.

The pressure on the party seemed immense on Wednesday evening, when Kannur MP K Sudhakaran threatened to quit, even saying "good bye" to leaders after learning that his name was not considered for the Kannur Assembly seat.

However, several leaders pacified Sudhakaran late on Wednesday and convinced him to abide by the party's decision.

District Congress committee President Satheesh Kochuparambil —*FACEBOOK*

Meanwhile, as he pitched for a UDF government in the Kerala, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday said that people of Kerala are ready for change.

"Team UDF is Team Keralam," he said in a post on X. "Each candidate reflects the voice, the aspirations and the trust of the people of Keralam. This is a collective of experienced leaders and young change-makers - a strong team of men and women who understand the intricacies of the constituencies they represent," Gandhi said in his post.

Additionally, as he batted for the UDF, which has been out of power in the state for a decade, Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Friday said that the LDF government in Kerala keeps the state reliant on remittances, lotteries, and liquor, a model that will not work anymore.

Meanwhile, breaking his silence after three CPI(M) leaders decided to contest as independents backed by Congress, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said that the tendency of growing "parliamentary ambitions" had emerged among some cadres.

However, Leader of Opposition in Kerala Assembly VD Satheesan on Friday alleged that a section of media spread false news about the Congress' candidate selection process at the behest of the CPI(M). —*PTI*

'LOCK AIADMK HQ'

AIADMK to finalise seat sharing with BJP-NDA: EPS

NEW DELHI/ CHENNAI, 20 MARCH

The AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami said on Friday that the party would finalise seat-sharing with BJP and other NDA allies for the 23 April Tamil Nadu Assembly polls and formally announce the constituencies allocated to them in the next four days.

Denying any hitch in the negotiations, Palaniswami, who had called on Union Home Minister Amit Shah at his residence on Thursday night, said the talks on seat sharing were smooth and it would be amicably resolved.

The AIADMK leads the multi-party National Democratic Alliance (NDA) including BJP, AMMK and PMK.

"Here it's (talks) not like it's done in the DMK alliance. They will be smooth, perfect here... our objective is to allot seats to our allies where they stand a bright prospect of winning," the former Chief Minister told reporters in the national capital before leaving for Chennai.

He said BJP Tamil Nadu in-charge Piyush Goyal would visit the state on Saturday to take forward the negotiations.

To a question, Palaniswami replied his party's election manifesto will be released in a week. He has already promised among other things to provide one-time assistance of Rs 10,000 to people to overcome the "economic hardship" caused by the DMK regime.

Meanwhile, in a swipe at Palaniswami over his meeting with Shah in New Delhi, DMK leader and state Minister KN Nehru said: "You may lock the party headquarters in Avvai Shanmugham Salai in Royapettah until the elections are over." —*PTI*

—ANI

Rohit seeks probe into black magic near Ajit's house

MUMBAI, 20 MARCH

NCP (SP) leader Rohit Pawar demanded an investigation into alleged black magic near the residences of late Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar, who died in a plane crash in Baramati on 28 January. He said, "Reports of alleged practices outside Ajit Pawar's residence in Pune and Mumbai involving Nashik astrologers are deeply disturbing." Pawar urged authorities to identify those behind the acts and their political motives. Earlier, MLA Amol Mitkari raised questions about rituals linked to 'Shivlika Ashram' run by Ashokkumar Kharat, who was arrested for alleged rape. Kharat's VSR connection and Ajit's plane travel on 28 January were also scrutinised. —*PTI*

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma files nomination for the Jalukbari constituency in Guwahati, Assam, on Friday —*PTI*

Assam: Cong, Raijor Dal finalise alliance

GUWAHATI/KOKRAJHAR, 20 MARCH

After days of negotiation and uncertainty, the Congress and Raijor Dal finalised seat-sharing arrangements for the Assam assembly polls, and decided that the national party will leave 11 constituencies for the other one, and there will be a friendly contest in two.

In a late-night development on Thursday at Jorhat, leaders of the two parties, headed by state Congress president Gaurav Gogoi and Raijor Dal chief Akhil Gogoi, signed the agreement.

Akhil Gogoi will contest from Sivasagar, a seat he won in the last polls while still in prison on sedition charges for allegedly instigating violence during the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protests.

The Congress had given the Margherita seat to the Raijor Dal. Earlier, the national party had given it to Prateek Bordoloi, who decided not to contest on a Congress ticket after his father defected to the BJP earlier this week.

The party has nominated a woman candidate, Gyanashree Bora, from the Mariani constituency.

The Congress has announced its complete list of 87 seats, the AJP in 10 seats while the CPI(M) and APHLC will contest in two seats each.

Meanwhile, NDA constituent Bodoland People's Front (BPF) has announced candidates for 11 seats it will be contesting in the Assembly elections, which include its lone minister in the current government, besides the wife of the party chief.

One of the three sitting MLAs of the party, Durga Das Boro, was dropped. —*PTI*

WB election: TMC releases manifesto, makes 10 pledges

KOLKATA, 20 MARCH

The Trinamool Congress released its manifesto for the West Bengal polls on Friday, betting big on welfare politics and wooing its formidable women support base with 10 pledges that encompass widening the ambit of existing welfare schemes, stronger healthcare outreach and infrastructure development.

The 10 "pratigyas" (pledges) party supremo Mamata Banerjee announced while unveiling the poll document, includes a Rs 500 hike in the Lakshmir Bhandar scheme for women and the launch of healthcare camps in every block of the state.

Women voters constitute nearly half of the state's electorate and are widely seen as the backbone of the TMC's electoral success over the past decade.

The manifesto also places a strong emphasis on social welfare, healthcare access, youth support and agriculture.

At the heart of the manifesto is the expansion of the Lakshmir Bhandar scheme, one of the TMC government's flagship welfare initiatives for women that is credited with consolidating the party's women support base.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee release the party manifesto ahead of the state Assembly elections, in Kolkata, on Friday —*PTI*

Babri Masjid is an emotion; I tried to apply balm on that wound of our community. For establishing the Babri Masjid, if 100 Muslims go to vote, 80 of them will vote for candidates of my party

-Humayun Kabir, TMC MLA

Under the revised benefit promised by the party, the monthly financial assistance will be increased by Rs 500. Women from the general category will receive Rs 1,500 per month, while those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes communities will get Rs 1,700 per month through direct transfers.

Elections to the 294-member West Bengal assembly will be held in two phases — on 23 and 29 April.

Votes will be counted on 4 May. —*PTI*

Mamata has violated EC poll code: Suvendu

KOLKATA, 20 MARCH

Leader of Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly Suvendu Adhikari on Friday alleged that Mamata Banerjee has violated the poll code by using the chief minister's letterhead for political correspondence and demanded immediate action by the Election Commission.

He argued that once the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is in effect, a clear distinction must be maintained between administrative duties and party politics.

"Once the poll code is in place, she cannot write political letters using the chief minister's pad. She can write as much as she wants on the Trinamool Congress pad... but using the CM's pad is a violation of the MCC," the BJP leader said.

TMC MOVES HC

Meanwhile, TMC MP and lawyer Kalyan Banerjee moved the Calcutta High Court questioning the EC's transfer order of several IAS and IPS officers in West Bengal without consulting the state government. The matter is likely to be heard next week. —*PTI*

RSS blames global conflicts on desire for dominance

NAGPUR, 20 MARCH

Selfish interests and the desire for dominance were the root cause of conflicts in the world, RSS Chief **Mohan Bhagwat** said on Friday, asserting that lasting peace can only be achieved through unity, discipline and adherence to dharma.

Addressing a gathering in Nagpur, Bhagwat said that for 2,000 years the world has experimented with various ideas to resolve conflicts with little success.

Religious intolerance, forced conversions and ideas of superiority and inferiority still exist, he pointed out.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief was addressing a gathering after laying the foundation stone for Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) Vidarbha region office in Nagpur.

He said that India's ancient wisdom teaches that "all are connected and one", and called for a shift from conflict to harmony and cooperation.

"People of India follow the law of humanity, but the rest of the world follows the law of the jungle. It is our job to restore balance in the stumbling world by giving it the foundation of dharma," the RSS head further added. —*PTI*

RS cross-voting: Fifth Haryana Congress MLA gets show-cause notice

CHANDIGARH, 20 MARCH

The Congress on Friday issued a show-cause notice to its fifth MLA from Haryana for alleged cross-voting during the recent Rajya Sabha elections.

The party had earlier issued similar notices to four other legislators in the state. The notice was served to Jarnail Singh, the MLA from Ratia, by Dharampal Malik, the chairman of the Disciplinary Action Committee of Haryana Congress.

Rohit Jain, member secretary of the committee, confirmed the development, stating the action was taken regarding Singh's conduct during the polls.

Jarnail Singh denied the allegations, describing himself as a disciplined soldier of the party. He claimed the move was an attempt to defame him and said that he had shown his marked ballot to the authorised party agent as per procedure.

The official notice cites "anti-party activities", alleging that during the election held on 16 March, 2026, Singh cast his vote in a manner contrary to the prescribed procedure and the official direction, resulting in the cancellation/invalidity of his vote. —*PTI*

Puducherry CM files nomination

PUDUCHERRY, 20 MARCH

Chief Minister and AINRC founder N Rangasamy were among a large number of candidates who filed nominations on Friday for the 9 April Assembly polls here.

Rangasamy filed nominations in the Thattanchavady and Mangalam segments. Thattanchavady has been his pocket borough and now he seeks to retain the constituency.

Agriculture Minister Theni C Djeacoumar (AINRC) emerged victorious in Mangalam constituency in the 2021 polls.

He is not contesting the upcoming poll and Rangasamy filed the papers in Mangalam segment as AINRC nominee.

Rangasamy contested the 2021 polls in two segments-Thattanchavady and Yanam, an enclave in Andhra Pradesh.

While he emerged victorious from Thattanchavady, he was defeated in Yanam by an Independent candidate Gollapalli Srinivasa Ashok in 2021.

AINRC and BJP reached an understanding on Friday on seat-sharing in the presence of Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, who is the BJP's election in charge in Puducherry. While AINRC will contest from 16 seats, the BJP contests in 10 segments and the AIADMK and Latchia Jananayaga Katchi (LJK) have been earmarked two seats each as part of the NDA. —*PTI*

CITES CONFLICT OF INTEREST

CJI recuses himself from EC hearing

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Friday recused himself from hearing a batch of petitions challenging the constitutional validity of a 2023 law that removed the CJI from a committee responsible for appointing the chief election commissioner and the ECs to the poll panel.

"I will be accused of conflict of interest. There is a conflict of interest," the CJI, who was sitting alongside Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi, said at the outset.

The bench was hearing PILs challenging the validity of certain provisions of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, on the ground that it excluded the Chief Justice of India from the selection panel responsible for appointing CEC and the ECs.

CJI Surya Kant —*PTI*

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The CJI said it would be appropriate for the case to be heard by a bench where no judge is in line to become the chief justice.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for one of the petitioners, supported the CJI's view.

He suggested that the matter be placed before a bench without any prospective chief justice to avoid any perception of bias.

"I personally don't have any problem, but it can be listed before a bench not having a prospective CJI," Bhushan said.

Accepting the suggestion, the CJI directed that the matter be listed before another bench on 7 April and indicated that the new bench would comprise judges who are not in line to assume the office of the CJI. —*PTI*

Key accused gets bail in Andhra liquor scam

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Friday granted regular bail to **Muppidi Avinash Reddy**, a key accused in the multi-crore Andhra Pradesh liquor policy scam.

The case involves alleged large-scale irregularities and a structured kickback network that operated between 2019 and 2024.

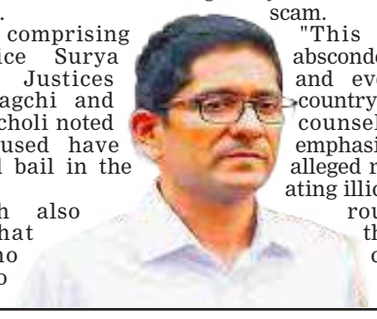
A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi noted that 11 accused have been granted bail in the case so far.

The bench also noted that Reddy, who had gone to Sri Lanka to evade arrest in the case, came back, surrendered and underwent custodial interrogation.

The bench clarified that the bail order was passed under the "peculiar circumstances" of the case and should not be treated as a legal precedent.

The state government, opposing the plea, highlighted the gravity of the Rs 730-crore scam.

"This person absconded for a year and even fled the country," the state's counsel argued, emphasising Reddy's alleged role in generating illicit funds and routing them through shell companies. —*PTI*



—PTI

SC to hear plea to probe rape of child in Gurugram

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The Supreme Court has agreed to hear a plea seeking a CBI or SIT investigation into the rape of a four-year-old girl in Gurugram. A three-judge bench including Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi took note of an urgent mention by senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, scheduling the hearing for Monday. Rohatgi stated police had taken no action despite the girl's statement to the magistrate. He added, police had not arrested anyone, secured the site, or collected CCTV footage, noting involvement of household maids. The CJI initially advised petitioners to approach the High Court, but Rohatgi argued a message should come from the highest court of the country.—*PTI*

Man killed in Haryana over social media post

GURUGRAM, 20 MARCH

A 55-year-old man was reportedly shot dead in Kherla village, Haryana's Nuh district, following a dispute over a controversial social media comment. Police said the incident occurred Thursday, with heavy security deployed in the village. The deceased, Khurshid, a local resident, was taken to Al Afia Hospital, where his body was kept. A case has been registered, and investigations launched. Police said the altercation began over a Facebook comment, escalating from a minor dispute between children to an adult confrontation involving Javed and Farid. The accused allegedly used an illegal firearm, resulting in Khurshid's death. Police are raiding to arrest the suspects; the situation is now under control. —*PTI*

Centre identifies districts for HIV/ AIDS intervention

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The Union Health Ministry has designated 219 districts in India as priorities for HIV/ AIDS interventions, including 11 districts in Haryana and seven in Delhi. Delhi's adult HIV prevalence stands at 0.33 per cent, with an estimated 59,079 affected individuals, while Haryana's prevalence rate is 0.24 per cent, with around 59,642 people living with HIV. The National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) held a Suraksha Sankalp Karyashala to strengthen district responses, chaired by Director General Dr Rakesh Gupta. Delhi's priority districts include North, New Delhi, Shahdara, Central, South East, South, and North West; Haryana's include Panipat, Rohtak, Sirsa, Jhajjar, Gurugram, and others. Dr Gupta reaffirmed India's declared goal to make HIV/AIDS a controlled epidemic by the year 2027. —*PTI*

HC flays accused Md Deepak for seeking protection

NAINITAL, 20 MARCH

The Uttarakhand High Court has reprimanded gym operator Deepak Kumar, who shot into the limelight as "Mohammad Deepak" for taking on Bajrang Dal activists allegedly harassing a Muslim shopkeeper, and asked how can an accused seek police protection. Justice Rakesh Thapliyal, on Thursday, while hearing Kumar's plea seeking quashing of the FIR, reprimanded him, objecting to his inclusion of unnecessary requests like seeking police protection and action against police officers for alleged 'biased' conduct. The bench termed such petitions as pressure tactics aimed at sensationalising the matter. The court also questioned the petitioner's justification for seeking police protection when he himself is a "suspected accused." —*PTI*

No clandestine Indian ops in Canada: Police chief

No foreign country interfering in Canada, says RCMP head

OTTAWA, 20 MARCH

There are "no longer any clandestine activities or transnational repression taking place" in Canada linked to the government of India, Canada's police chief said.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Commissioner Mike Duheme said this during an interview with CTV News.

"We're not seeing any connection right now with any foreign entity, based on current investigations," he said while responding to a question whether "transnational repression by agents of India" was still a concern.

"I'm saying that based on the totality of files that we have on foreign interference or transnational repression, what we have is people who are intimidating others, but connecting the dots to a foreign entity, regardless of the country, we don't have that," Duheme said in the interview that would be aired on Sunday.

No evidence of a foreign hand, said RCMP chief Mike Duheme —*ANI*

His comments came after months of diplomatic tensions between Canada and India.

- India-Canada ties hit rock bottom following former Prime Minister Trudeau's allegations in 2023 of a potential Indian link to the killing of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar. India had dismissed Trudeau's accusation as "absurd"

In the last few months, India and Canada have taken several steps to normalise their relations.

India-Canada ties hit rock bottom following former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations in 2023 of a potential Indian link to the killing of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar. India dismissed Trudeau's accusation as "absurd."

In October 2024, India recalled its high commissioner and five other diplomats after Ottawa attempted to link them to the Nijjar case. India also expelled an equal number of Canadian diplomats.

However, Liberal Party leader Mark Carney's victory in the parliamentary election in April 2025 helped in beginning the process to reset relations.

Subsequently, both sides have already posted their high commissioners in each other's capitals.

Carney visited India earlier this month during which the two sides sealed pacts on supplies of Uranium and other critical minerals and vowed to conclude a comprehensive economic partnership agreement soon. — *PTI*

LACK OF EVIDENCE

Delhi court acquits two alleged ISIS-JK operatives

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

Flagging gaps in the probe, a Delhi court acquitted two men accused of pledging allegiance to the banned terrorist organisation ISIS, and of procuring arms and ammunition from Uttar Pradesh for the Islamic State Jammu & Kashmir (ISIS-JK) cadres for executing terror attacks.

Underlining that the prosecution had failed to prove its case beyond reasonable doubt, Additional Sessions Judge Amit Bansal acquitted Jamsheed Zahoor Paul and Parvaiz Rashid Lone, residents of Shopian in Kashmir, who were arrested in 2018.

The special cell of the Delhi Police had registered a case against them under Sections 18 (conspiracy) and 20 (members of terrorist gang or organisation) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and under the Arms Act. Police claimed that they had received a tip-off on 6 September 2018 that Paul and Lone had pledged allegiance to the ISIS and were in Delhi to procure weapons for terrorist attacks. The Special Cell alleged the duo was apprehended at the Jama Masjid bus stop on Netaji Subhash Marg, near the Red Fort, with two 7.65mm pistols and 10 live cartridges. — *PTI*

Delhi HC restores PIL on forced unnatural sex

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The Delhi High Court said it will consider a PIL seeking penal provisions in criminal law for non-consensual unnatural sex, akin to Section 377 of IPC, observing that the Centre's decision on the issue was "nowhere in sight" even after one-and-a-half years.

Chief Justice DK Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia restored the petition filed by Gantavya Gulati on Friday, which was disposed of in August 2024 with a direction to the Centre to decide the plea within six months.

The petitioner said legal protection was required for the LGBTQ community in case of non-consensual unnatural sex. "The direction to take a decision on the representation was issued by the court on 28 August 2024. However, the decision is nowhere in sight. In view of that, the writ is restored," the bench said.The bench also sought an affidavit from the Centre on steps taken by it to ensure compliance with the earlier direction. The Centre's counsel submitted that inputs have been invited from stakeholders.

"Let an affidavit be filed on steps taken to ensure compliance with the 28 August 2024 order within four weeks," the court ordered. — *PTI*

Man threatens Union minister Jayant

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

Union minister Jayant Chaudhary allegedly received a death threat from an unknown caller, triggering a review of his security and a police probe based on a complaint, officials said on Friday.

Police said the caller has been traced to Murshidabad in West Bengal.

Chaudhary, the minister of state (Independent Charge) for skill development and entrepreneurship, received the threat call at around 11 am on 18 March from an unidentified number, the officials said.

According to the complaint lodged on Chaudhary's behalf at Tughlak Road police station, the caller threatened to kill the minister and referred to weapons like MP5 guns.

Jayant Chaudhary —*ANI*

The caller also asked the minister whether he had seen certain documents sent to him and repeatedly threatened him before disconnecting the call, the complaint stated.

The officials said subsequent messages received from the same number showed threatening remarks written on an itinerary of a "tour programme" of the minister. The messages also contained location details and voice notes reiterating the threats.

- Police said that a preliminary investigation had identified the caller who made the threat as Mohammad Ismail, a resident of Murshidabad district in West Bengal

Later, the caller claimed that the information had been "sent from above," raising further concern. All relevant evidence, including call details, messages and screenshots, has been shared with police, the complaint stated.

The complaint also mentioned suspicious activity near Chaudhary's residence, including alleged surveillance by unidentified persons.

A white car with tinted windows was seen stationed near Chaudhary's residence for a considerable period of time a few days ago, with its occupants allegedly monitoring movement in the area, it claimed.

Police said that according to preliminary investigation, the caller has been identified as Mohammad Ismail, a resident of Murshidabad in West Bengal. Efforts are being made to apprehend him and ascertain the motive behind the threat.

They said they are verifying all angles, including the reconnaissance, and have stepped up security. — *PTI*

Runaway couple seeks help, CJI says move HC

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

A plea concerning a runaway couple seeking protection was mentioned on Friday before the Supreme Court, which asked the lawyer to move the Delhi High Court for the relief.

The lawyer, who mentioned the plea for protecting the runaway couple from their families, had found the young couple in the SC parking lot.

The lawyer said the couple came to the Supreme Court thinking that they could get married on the court premises and receive protection from the Chief Justice of India.

The counsel said the couple feared serious harm, claiming that their parents intended to punish them severely for their relationship.

Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi asked the lawyer to approach the HC with the plea.

The lawyer said that she escorted the couple to the Tilak Marg Police Station to seek assistance. However, she alleged that instead of offering protection, the police tried to detain them.

- The lawyer said the couple had come to the Supreme Court thinking that they could get married on the court premises and receive protection from the Chief Justice of India

Responding to the mention, the CJI asked why litigants ignore High Courts in such matters.

The CJI said that as a former judge of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, he had handled many such cases.

The CJI said if the High Court fails to provide relief, the parties can approach the Supreme Court.

The bench also indicated that it would communicate with the Registrar (Judicial) of the concerned HC to facilitate consideration of the matter. — *PTI*

CLEARING THE WAY

A snow clearance vehicle of the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) removes snow from the Mughal Road in Poonch on Friday as snow and freezing rain returned to Kashmir once again —*ANI*

Cabs must assist differently-abled: SC

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The Supreme Court emphasised the need to find ways to assist people with disabilities, and suggested that cabs should be equipped to accommodate wheelchairs and other assistive devices for them.

The observations came from a bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta, which was hearing a plea regarding first-mile and last-mile connectivity for people with disabilities.

The counsel appearing for the petitioner referred to the difficulties faced by people with disabilities while boarding cabs.

"Most cabs run on CNG, which limits space and does not allow wheelchairs to be transported in the back," the counsel said. He proposed implementing a universal design similar to what is available in European markets.

The Centre's counsel stated that these issues are currently under review.

They also informed the bench that a committee had been appointed by the Supreme Court to address a separate petition that raised similar concerns.

The bench observed that the issue raised in this petition could also be considered by that committee.

The Supreme Court has scheduled further hearings on the plea on 24 March. — PTI

Man dies in KG Kar hospital lift, BJP calls it murder

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

A man died allegedly after getting stuck in A lift at the state-run RG Kar hospital in Kolkata on Friday, prompting BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari to call it a "murder" and blame Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for the incident.

While the BJP alleged that corruption in the state's healthcare system was the cause of the incident, Adhikari held CM Banerjee, who holds charge of the health department, Health Secretary Narayan Swaroop Nigam and the hospital superintendent responsible for the death.

The leader of the opposition in the Assembly, claimed the elevator at the RG Kar Medical College, where the man died, was being serviced at the time.

"I have documents with me... they intentionally killed the man using a lift that was being repaired. A case of murder should be registered in the matter," he told reporters while campaigning in Purba Medinipur.

The death occurred when the victim had brought his four-year-old son for treatment at the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital. — *PTI*

COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT

SC relief for 'Kahaani 2' filmmaker

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The Supreme Court quashed proceedings pending before a Jharkhand court against filmmaker Sujoy Ghosh in an alleged copyright infringement case over his movie 'Kahaani 2.'

A bench of Justices PS Narasimha and Alok Aradhe allowed Ghosh's plea on Friday, challenging a Jharkhand High Court order (dated 22 April 2025), which had refused to quash the proceedings pending against him.

"The summoning order dated 7 June 2018 passed by the CJM and the order dated 22 April 2025 passed by the HC are quashed," the bench said.

In July 2025, the SC had issued notice to the Jharkhand government on Ghosh's plea to quash the case pending before the court of CJM, Hazaribagh.

The filmmaker had moved the HC against the CJM court's order holding a prima facie case of copyright infringement against him under Section 63 of the Copyright Act, 1957.

The HC dismissed Ghosh's plea, observing it would not conduct a "mini-trial" at the quashing stage.

The complainant, Umesh Prasad Mehta, had written a script for the film "Sabak" which was certified by the Notary Public of Hazaribagh for obtaining its copyright.

It was alleged that the complainant met Ghosh and obtained a recommendation letter, which was essential for obtaining the copyright of a film script.

- Ghosh allegedly kept a photocopy of the script and infringed on the copyright of the complainant by producing the film 'Kahani 2.' The film was seen by the complainant at a film hub at Hazaribagh

Ghosh allegedly kept a photocopy of the script and infringed on the copyright of the complainant by producing the film 'Kahani 2.' The film was seen by the complainant at a film hub at Hazaribagh.

After watching the film, the complainant alleged that Sujoy Ghosh had stolen his script. — *PTI*

RELEASE OF 'THE VOICE OF HIND RAJAB' HELD UP, SAYS DISTRIBUTOR

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The India release of Oscar-nominated film 'The Voice of Hind Rajab,' based on the story of a five-year-old Palestinian girl killed by Israeli forces in 2024, is stuck in limbo as the distributor is still awaiting a censor certificate. The movie, which was nominated in the best international film category at the 98th Academy Awards earlier this month, was acquired for release in India as well as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Afghanistan and Bangladesh by distributor Manoj Nandwana of Jai Viratra Entertainment Limited.

Nandwana said the film was screened before the CBFC recently and they didn't find anything objectionable in it.

Nandwana said the film has been sent to the revising committee but he does not have much hope.

Written and directed by Tunisian filmmaker Kaouther Ben Hania, 'The Voice of Hind Rajab' recounts the real story of Hind Rajab, who was fleeing Gaza City in January 2024 with her family when their car came under fire from Israeli forces. — *PTI*

A scene from 'The Voice of Hind Rajab' —*SCREENGRAB*

RAMADAN EVE

Bengaluru's Commercial Street is lit up with decorative lights for Ramadan. Traffic was chock--a-block on Friday as shoppers throng markets on the eve of Eid ul-fitr
—MOHAMMED ASAD

As missiles & drones rain, Gulf nations prepare for Eid

Amid intermittent missile and drone attacks, sirens, and a palpable sense of uncertainty, citizens and residents across the Gulf region are preparing for an unprecedented Eid on Friday, marking the end of the fasting month of Ramzan.

The crisis that was triggered by Israel and the United States attacking Iran on 28 February, and a spate of assassinations, targeted bombings, and revenge strikes on Israel and across the Gulf, has hung over the holy month in this part of the world.

The cascading effect and the fog of war have left an indelible mark on the region and threaten to spread far beyond. With the Strait of Hormuz virtually brought to a standstill and threatening global energy security, the economic footprint of this war has begun to extend far beyond, including India, which relies heavily on energy supplies from the oil wells of Arabia. With LNG supplies from Qatar significantly impacted, the pain is being felt in millions of homes that use cooking gas across South Asia.

The Eid festivities are unlikely to bring much ease amid these circumstances.

Even though families – mostly stuck at home due to frequent warnings and schoolchildren taking online classes – have occasionally driven around to defy fear and keep a semblance of normalcy, they would know they are not out of the woods as they mark the occasion.

"It's the long-term impact that everyone is worried about. They know they are not the primary targets of these attacks, but it's the ecosystem that would need some confidence going forward," said an Abu Dhabi-based Indian engineer on the condition of anonymity.

A healthcare professional in the Saudi Arabian city of Jeddah said the Indian community in this part of the world has largely stayed put and has not panicked at all. "They are aware that this is a passing phase and that they have too high stakes to just desert the region."

A family breaks their fast in a shelter in Lebanon amid the ongoing conflicts *—PTI*

People shopping ahead of Eid ul-Fitr in Saudi Arabia *—PTI*

According to him, the crisis will eventually lead to opportunities, even though the primary concern now is the immediate cessation of hostilities. That cessation doesn't appear anywhere close, going by what has transpired in recent days.

That said, people who have managed to secure flight seats and have extended work-from-home options have also chosen to fly back home. It was reported earlier on Wednesday that Air India and Air India Express will run scheduled and non-scheduled services centred on the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Oman as some Gulf routes remain "temporarily suspended." The two airlines said they will continue scheduled operations to Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) and Muscat (Oman), including 16 flights between India and Jeddah.

As Eid ushers in, authorities are leaving no stone unturned to ensure a smooth celebration amid a subdued sense of festivity. The UAE has announced that this year's Eid-ul-Fitr prayers will be held exclusively "inside mosques, instead of the traditional outdoor gatherings, in light of regional security concerns."

According to the UAE's General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Endowments (GAIAE), the decision "aims to ensure the safety and security of worshippers." Qatar has also announced that this year's Eid ul-Fitr prayers will be held indoors at mosques across the country.

Unfazed, though, ladies are flocking to malls and shopping complexes to do some last-minute shopping. Rulers and government officials have been exchanging Eid greetings, and authorities are working overtime to ensure everything goes smoothly, despite the additional and onerous task of securing the skies.

Whichever way one looks at it, this is an Eid no one in the region prepared for and would be secretly hoping brings far better news than just greetings, food, and festivities. It will quickly turn into the biggest Eid of their lifetimes if the news of an end to war, or at least a ceasefire, comes with it. *—PTI*

SALAR ساہ

Muslims worldwide prepare to celebrate Eid

Muslims around the world are bidding farewell to the Islamic holy month of Ramadan and will soon start celebrating the holiday of Eid ul-Fitr.

Eid is typically greeted with joy and excitement and is marked with congregational prayers and festivities that usually include family visits, gatherings, outings and new clothes.

But this year, Eid is approaching amid the Iran war, which has been roiling many countries in West Asia and leading to far-reaching consequences beyond.

In the United States, many Muslims observed Ramadan's religious and social traditions this year under a cloud of worrisome domestic and international events.

Those include immigration crackdown fears and anti-Muslim rhetoric in the US, as well as the war in West Asia, where many have loved ones.

Women shop for bangles and clothes ahead of Ramadan in Bengaluru *—MOHAMMED ASAD*

THE HOLIDAY MARKS THE END OF RAMADAN

Eid ul-Fitr is an Islamic holiday marking the end of Ramadan, the month when devout Muslims fast daily from dawn to sunset.

Ramadan is a time for increased worship, charity and good deeds, and typically sees festive gatherings to break the fast.

Eid ul-Fitr means the feast, or festival, of breaking the fast.

EID UL-FITR CYCLES THROUGH THE SEASONS

Islam follows a lunar calendar, and so Ramadan and Eid cycle through the seasons.

This year, the first day of Eid ul-Fitr is expected to be on or around 20-21 March. The actual date may vary among countries and Muslim communities.

GREETING THOSE CELEBRATING EID

To greet someone celebrating Eid, you can say: Eid Mubarak, or Blessed Eid, and Happy Eid.

TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS ASSOCIATED WITH EID UL-FITR

In Indonesia, many people embark on an exodus to their hometowns to celebrate the holiday with loved ones in a homecoming tradition. People pour out of major cities to return to villages to celebrate the holiday with prayers and family gatherings.

Before the holiday, popular markets typically teem with shoppers buying clothes, shoes, cookies and sweets.

In Malaysia, Muslims also have a homecoming tradition for Eid. The first day usually begins with a morning prayer in the mosque, seeking forgiveness from family and friends, and visiting loved ones' graves.

There's an "open house" spirit that sees friends and families trading visits to celebrate Eid and enjoy traditional delicacies.

Older Muslims give money in green packets to children and guests who visit their homes.

In Egypt, families partake in Eid prayers amid a festive atmosphere. Many visit relatives, friends or neighbours and some travel to vacation spots. Children, usually wearing new Eid outfits, receive traditional cash gifts known as "eidiya."

Making or buying Eid cookies dusted with powdered sugar is another fixture of marking the holiday in the country.

In the United States, where Muslims make up an ethnically and racially diverse minority, many come together for Eid prayers and for festivals featuring fun activities for children and families. These often include face painting and balloon twisting. *—PTI*

Palestinian man offer Eid al-Fitr prayers in Jerusalem as the Old City remains closed to visitors under nationwide Home Front Command restrictions banning large gatherings *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Energy fallout from Iran war a global wake-up call for renewable push

An Aramco gas facility in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, was attacked, triggering a fire in 2 storage tanks *—SCREENGRAB*

The war in Iran is exposing the world's reliance on fragile fossil-fuel supply chains, lending urgency to calls to accelerate the shift to renewable energy.

Fighting has all but halted oil exports through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow waterway that carries about a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas, or LNG. The disruption has jolted energy markets, pushing up prices and straining import-dependent economies.

Asia, where most of the oil was headed, has been hit hardest. Still, the disruptions are also a strain for Europe, where policymakers are looking for ways to cut energy demand, and for Africa, which is bracing for rising fuel costs and inflation.

Unlike during previous oil shocks, renewable power is now competitive with fossil fuels in many places. More than 90 per cent of new renewable power projects worldwide in 2024 were cheaper than fossil-fuel alternatives, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency.

Oil is used in many industries beyond electricity generation, such as fertiliser and plastics production. So, most countries are feeling the impact, while those with more renewable power are more insulated since renewables rely on domestic resources like sun and wind, not imported fuels.

"These crises regularly occur," said James Bowen of the Australia-based consultancy, ReMap Research. "They are a feature, not a bug, of a fossil fuel-based energy system."

CHINA AND INDIA BUILT RENEWABLE BUFFERS, BUT CHINA'S IS LARGER

China and India, the world's two most populous countries, face the same challenge of generating enough electricity to power growth for over a billion people. Both have expanded renewable energy, but China did so on a far larger scale despite its continued reliance on coal-fired power.

Today, China leads the world in renewables. About one in 10 cars in China is electric, according to the International Energy Agency. It's still the world's largest importer of crude oil and the biggest buyer of Iranian oil. But electrifying parts of its economy with renewables has reduced its reliance on imports.

India also has expanded its use of clean energy, especially solar power, but more slowly and with less government support for manufacturing renewable energy equipment and connecting solar to its power grid.

RICH COUNTRIES FALLBACK ON FOSSIL FUELS

The energy shock is familiar to wealthy countries in Europe and East Asia.

In 2022, some European governments tried to cut dependence on fossil fuels. But many soon focused on finding new fossil fuel suppliers instead, said Pauline Heinrichs, who studies climate and energy at King's College London.

Europe's excess spending on fossil fuels since the Russia-Ukraine War amounted to about 40 per cent of the investment needed to transition its power system to clean energy, according to a 2023 study.

Solar and wind make up just 11 per cent of Japan's energy production, on a par with India but behind China's 18 per cent, according to Ember. Japan's energy use is much lower than that of both nations.

The Iran war dominated the agenda during Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's meeting this week with US President Donald Trump.

POOR COUNTRIES ARE THE MOST EXPOSED

Poorer nations in Asia and Africa are competing with wealthy European and Asian countries and major buyers such as India and China for limited gas supplies, pushing up prices.

Import-dependent economies — such as Benin and Zambia in Africa and Bangladesh and Thailand in Asia — could face some of the biggest shocks. Costly fuel makes transport and food more expensive, and many countries have limited foreign-exchange reserves, restricting their ability to pay for imports if prices stay high.

But not all are opting for renewables: South Africa is considering building an LNG import terminal and new gas-fired power plants.

Others, like Ethiopia, which banned gasoline- and diesel-fueled cars in 2024 to promote electric vehicles, are doubling down on renewables.

The real challenge is not just to withstand the next shock, but to ensure it doesn't "derail the country's development trajectory," said Hanan Hassen, an analyst at Ethiopia's government-linked think tank, the Institute of Foreign Affairs.

RENEWABLES PROVIDE A CUSHION FOR SOME

Increased use of renewable energy has helped shield some Asian countries from the energy shock.

Pakistan's solar boom has preempted more than $12 billion in fossil fuel imports since 2020 and could save another $6.3 billion in 2026 at current prices, according to think tanks Renewables First and the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

Vietnam's current solar generation will help the country save hundreds of millions of dollars in potential coal and gas imports in the coming year, based on current high prices, according to the research group, Zero Carbon Analytics.

OTHER COUNTRIES ARE STRETCHING TIGHT SUPPLIES

Bangladesh has closed universities to save electricity. It has limited storage capacity to absorb supply shocks, so the government started rationing fuel after a flurry of panic buying at filling stations, said Khondaker Golam Moazzem, an economist with the Centre for Policy Dialogue in Dhaka.

For now, governments must manage shortages and control prices. Thailand has suspended petroleum exports, boosted its gas production and begun drawing on reserves.

If the conflict bleeds into April, Thailand's finite reserves and limited budget for subsidies mean prices will shoot higher, warned Areeporn Asawinpongphan, a research fellow with the Thailand Development Research Institute. *—PTI*

FRIENDS, FOES, AND THE FIGHT FOR OIL

Sri Lanka refused US request to land warplanes: Prez

COLOMBO, 20 MARCH

President **Anura Kumara Dissanayake** told Parliament on Friday that Sri Lanka denied permission for two US warplanes from Djibouti to land at Sri Lanka's Mattala International Airport.

"They wanted to bring in two warplanes armed with eight anti-ship missiles... and we said no," the Sri Lankan President said.

"We want to maintain our neutrality despite many pressures," he said.

Dissanayake's remarks followed his meeting with US envoy Sergio Gor, where they discussed safeguarding sea lanes and ports, strengthening trade, and promoting an open Indo-Pacific.

The US torpedoed the Iranian frigate IRIS Dena off Galle on 4 March, killing 84 sailors as it returned from a naval exercise in India. Two days later, on Friday, a second Iranian vessel — IRIS Bushehr— sought entry to Colombo port but was diverted to Trincomalee, with 204 of its 219 sailors now accommodated at a naval facility near the capital. *—PTI*

Enemies' security should be taken away: Mojtaba

DUBAI, 20 MARCH

Iranian Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei expressed condolences for the slaying of security chief Ali Larijani, according to a written statement published in Iranian media.

He called for the enemies of his nations to have their "security" taken away, in his latest message to the public.

"Undoubtedly, the assassination of such a person shows the extent of his importance and the hatred of the enemies of Islam towards him," Mojtaba said. "All blood has its price that the criminal murderers of the martyrs must pay soon."

Khamenei hasn't been seen since he was named as supreme leader, succeeding his father, the 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed in an Israeli airstrike on the first day of the war on 28 February.

American and Israeli officials have suggested that Mojtaba Khamenei was hurt in the war. However, state media posted a video of Mojtaba delivering a religious sermon on Friday, likely for Eid ul-Fitr. *—Agencies*

Europe, Canada, Japan join to open Hormuz

BRUSSELS, 20 MARCH

Several European nations alongside Canada and Japan said in a joint statement on Thursday that they will join appropriate efforts to help ensure a safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz.

"We express our readiness to contribute to appropriate efforts to ensure safe passage through the Strait," the statement by Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Japan and Canada read. "We welcome the commitment of nations who are engaging in preparatory planning."

It was not immediately clear if they would send ships.

Around one-fifth of the world's oil supply passes through the Strait of Hormuz, which has effectively become untraversable for ships after Israel-US launched strikes on Israel. As a result, oil prices have skyrocketed over the past few weeks.

The statement condemned Iran's de-facto closure of the Strait and attacks on "unarmed commercial vessels in the Gulf, attacks on civilian infrastructure including oil and gas installations". It did not condemn the US-Israeli strikes.

European leaders were deeply critical of the Iranian government, but none have offered immediate help to the US. Britain is flat-out refusing to be drawn into the war. France says the fighting would have to die down first.

US President Donald Trump has hinted that their refusal could destabilise NATO.

Meanwhile, all heads of the 27 European Union issued a joint statement on Thursday calling for the stabilisation of energy shipments and "de-escalation and maximum restraint" from warring parties.

"The EU Council deplores the loss of civilian life," the statement read. The leaders also asked Iran to stop striking neighbours across the Persian Gulf and sought cooperation to prevent any large-scale refugee crises in West Asia. *—Agencies*

IRAN CLAIMS 'WORLD FIRST' HIT ON PRICIEST US FIGHTER JET F-35

TEHRAN, 20 MARCH

Iran claimed on Thursday to be the first nation in the world to strike a F-35 Lightning 2 jet, one of the most valuable and expensive US aircrafts.

The IRGC said it had successfully hit a F-35 stealth fighter jet in central Iran's airspace. The jet was struck at 2.50 am by the IRGC's advanced, modern air defence systems, according to an IRCG statement on Thursday.

A CNN confirmed that an F-35 performed an emergency landing after an Iranian surface-to-air missile (SAM) barrage, with the pilot safe and an investigation underway.

The IRGC noted that the interception follows the successful downing of more than 125 US-Israeli drones, signalling significant upgrades in the country's integrated air defence network.

Over 19 countries have flown or are preparing to fly the Lightning 2. *—ANI*

F-35 LIGHTENING II

It is world's most advanced 5th-generation fighter jet. The single-engine, single-seat jet combines unmatched stealth, advanced sensor fusion, and acts as a flying command centre, sharing real-time data with ground, naval, and aerial forces.

Cost: Over **$100M** Lifetime operational costs exceed $2 trillion

Speed: **1,200 mph,** can achieve Mach 1.6 (1,960 km/h)

Weapons payload: **8,160kg**

Maker: Lockheed Martin

Length: 15.7m | **Wingspan:** 10.7m | **Height:** 4.38m

F-35 can generate sorties at -40º, a vital requirement for US air base in Alaska

Iran pounds energy infra after Israel strikes

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said it targeted refineries in Haifa, Israel's third largest city, and in Ashdod *—SCREENGRAB*

DUBAI, 20 MAR

Iran continued to target energy infrastructure in West Asia after Israel pounded Iran's offshore natural gas field. The attacks on Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE and Kuwait further spiked oil prices. Iran had promised to hit the energy field after Israel targeted South Pars, the world's largest gas field which is responsible for 80 per cent of Iran's energy needs.

On Thursday, Iran's strikes in Qatar had disrupted about 17 per cent of Doha's liquefied natural gas (LNG) export capacity. This threatens its ability to supply to European and Asian countries – including India, which relies on Doha for about 41 per cent of its gas imports, and would tale likely five years to fix.

Two waves of Iranian drones attacked a Kuwaiti oil refinery early on Friday, sparking a fire. The Mina Al-Ahmadi refinery, which can process some 7,30,000 barrels of oil per day, is one of the largest in the Middle East. It was damaged on Thursday in another Iranian attack.

Bahrain said a fire broke out after shrapnel from an intercepted projectile landed on a warehouse, and Saudi Arabia reported shooting down multiple drones targeting its oil-rich Eastern Province.

Heavy explosions also shook Dubai as air defences intercepted incoming fire.

Iranian missiles also hit the Israeli oil refineries in the northern port city of Haifa but did not cause "significant damage".

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said it had targeted refineries in Haifa, Israel's third-largest city, and in Ashdod, in the country's south. It was unclear of the latter was hit as Israel – much like the Gulf countries and Iran – has imposed a temporary information blockade.

DEBRIS FALLS NEAR WEST WALL

Loud explosions could also be heard in Jerusalem after the Israeli army warned of incoming Iranian missiles. Debris from a drone debris landed less than 500m from The Western Wall, the holiest site where Jews can pray, and Al Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest site in Islam. It struck just above Dung Gate, one of seven functional entrances into the Old City. Explosions continued across Tehran.

IRAN THREATENS TOURIST SITES

Iran's top military spokesman, Gen Abolfazl Shekarchi, warned Friday that "parks, recreational areas and tourist destinations" worldwide won't be safe for Tehran's enemies.

"We are producing missiles even during war conditions, which is amazing, and there is no particular problem in stockpiling," spokesman Gen Ali Mohammad Naeini said.

Iranians were also celebrating the Persian New Year, known as Nowruz, a normally festive holiday that is more subdued this year.

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-21

US SENDS MORE TROOPS & SHIPS

Officials said the USS Boxer and two other amphibious assault ships have deployed along with roughly 2,500 Marines from the home port of San Diego.

Earlier, the US began moving the amphibious assault ship the USS Tripoli to the Gulf.

It is expected to arrive in the next few days, with 2,500 Marines, raising speculations about a possible ground invasion.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump called NATO a "paper tiger"for being unwilling to assist in the operation. *—Agencies*

Bibi hints at ground op as US ties strain

WASHINGTON, 20 MARCH

Israeli Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu** signalled that there would be boots on the ground in Iran soon, as his comments on Israel's decision to attack Iran's South Pars gas field – the largest in the world – diverged from those of US President **Donald Trump**.

"You can't do revolutions from the air," Netanyahu said in Jerusalem. "There has to be a ground component as well. There are many possibilities for component, and I take the liberty of not sharing with you all those possibilities."

Trump, during an Oval Office meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, told reporters that he neither agreed with nor approved of Israel's attack.

"I told him, 'Don't do that,'" Trump said of Netanyahu's decision to strike. "We get along great. It's coordinated, but on occasion he'll do something. And if I don't like it -- and so we're not doing that anymore."

Netanyahu claimed that the US-Israeli strikes across Iran, which have killed at least 1,400 people, were creating the conditions for the Iranian people to overthrow the regime.

"You don't want to replace one Ayatollah with another. You don't want to replace Hitler with Himmler," he said, referring to Nazi SS Chief Heinrich Himmler.

Netanyahu also stated that Israel "acted alone" in striking Iran's South Pars gasfield, though he didn't address whether or not he had told Trump about the attack beforehand.

Trump had earlier posted on Truth Social that Israel carried out the strikes without consulting the US. However, Israeli officials later told several American publications that Israel had indeed informed the US of its plans to bomb Iran's energy lifeline.

Netanyahu added that: "Look, I don't think any two leaders have been as coordinated as Trump and I. He's the leader. I'm his ally. America is the leader."

On reports that Israel dragged US into the war, Netanyahu said: "Does anyone really think that someone can tell Trump what to do?... I misled no one." *—Agencies*

Pentagon seeks $200B more for Iran war

The Pentagon is seeking $200 billion in additional funds for the Iran war from Congress. This comes amid national debt surging past a record $39 trillion. However, Trump said it would be "small price to pay" to ensure the US military remains fully prepared.

Israel bombs Syria after attack on Druze

Israel's military said on Friday it struck Sweida, Syria in response to attacks against the Druze group, comprising a major portion of the Israeli population. The extent of damages is not ye known. This marks Israels first attack on Syria since the war started.

Fitness app reveals French carrier location

A French naval officer's fitness app activity exposed the location of the French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle in the Mediterranean. The officer logged a run on his public profile on a fitness app linked to his watch, placing the 900-foot ship off the Turkish coast.

Iran executes 3, including teen wrestler

Iran has executed three people, including wrestler Saleh Mohammadi, 19, for allegedly killing two police officers during protests in January. These are the first known executions of the protesters. International rights groups say the trials were not fair.

'Surprise Iran strike is like Pearl Harbour'

WASHINGTON, 20 MARCH

US President Donald Trump defended surprise strike Iran by comparing it to when Japan bombed Pearl Harbour during World War 2, during a meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's official visit to the White House.

Asked by a Japanese journalist why the US had not warned its allies it was going to strike Iran on 28 February, Trump said: "Who knows better about surprise than Japan? Why didn't you tell me about Pearl Harbour?"

Takaichi's slight smile appeared to drop, and she raised her eyebrows.

Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi dines with US President Donald Trump in the State Dining Room of the White House on Thursday*—x*

The 1941 Japanese attack on US soil led to US joining World War 2 and eventually dropping two nuclear bombs on Japan.

- When asked why the US had not warned its allies it was going to strike Iran, Trump said, "Who knows better about surprise than Japan? Why didn't you tell me about Pearl Harbour?"

Takaichi, meanwhile, called Trump good looking while wishing his son Barron Trump a happy birthday. She said: "I firmly believe that it is only you, Donald, who can achieve world peace." *—Agencies*

Israel shuts Al Aqsa Mosque for 1st time since 1967

JERUSALEM, 20 MARCH

Israel closed the **Al Aqsa Mosque** compound for Eid ul-Fitr prayers, for the first time in decades.

The full closure of marks the first since the 1967 Mideast war, when Israel occupied East Jerusalem and the Old City.

Unverified videos showed Israeli officials firing tear gas and using batons to disperse Muslims who came to pray at. Muslims prayed outside the mosque after

The mosque sits on a hilltop compound that is sacred to Muslims and Jews and has become a flashpoint for tensions between Israelis and Palestinians as it is near the Western Wall.

Israel has kept holy sites in the Old City closed to worshippers of all faiths throughout the Iran war, citing security, though the restrictions have had the broadest effect on Muslims, whom normally come for Friday prayer at Al Aqsa. *—Agencies*

Israel kills IRGC spokesperson

TEHRAN, 20 MARCH

Iranian media said on Friday that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) spokesperson Brigadier Gen Ali Mohammad Naeini, 69, was killed in US-Israeli strikes.

He held the rank of second brigadier general and had been the IRCG spokesperson since 2024. Naeini was one of IRGC's top specialists in psychological, soft power, and cognitive warfare.

Earlier this week, Iranian security chief Ali Larijani and Gholamreza Soleimani were also killed in Israeli air strikes. *—ANI*

Cuba to get Russian oil shipment as energy crisis worsens

HAVANA, 20 MARCH

Cuba will receive its first Russian oil shipment this year amid power outages and a failing grid due to US sanctions.

The Russian tanker, carrying 7,30,000 barrels of fuel, is expected in 10 days. Energy expert Jorge Pinon says it could produce enough diesel for nine or ten days.

A second vessel carrying 200,000 barrels of Russian diesel has gone untracked.

Cuba, dependent on imports, faces shortages, blackouts, protests, and economic decline worsened by US sanctions and halted shipments from Venezuela and Mexico. *—PTI*

THE 'OG' MACHO MAN

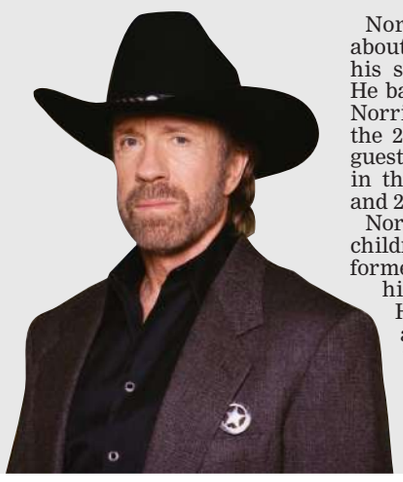
Martial arts icon & actor Chuck Norris no more

NEW YORK, 20 MARCH

Chuck Norris, the martial arts grandmaster and action star whose roles in 'Walker, Texas Ranger' and other television shows and movies made him an iconic tough guy died at 86 on Thursday.

Before becoming a star in movies and on TV, Norris was very successful in martial arts. He became a six-time undefeated World Professional Middleweight Karate champion. He also founded his own Korean-based American hard style karate known sometimes as Chun Kuk Do and the United Fighting Arts Federation, which has awarded around 3,300 Chuck Norris System black belts worldwide. Black Belt magazine ultimately credited Norris in its hall of fame with holding a 10th degree black belt, the highest possible honour.

Born Carlos Ray Norris in Ryan, Oklahoma, on 10 March 1940, he grew up poor. At age 12, he moved with his family to Torrance, California, and joined the US Air Force after high school, in 1958. It was during deployment to Korea that he started training in martial arts.



Norris was outspoken about his Christian faith and his support for gun rights. He backed many politicians. Norris endorsed Trump in the 2016 election and wrote guest columns praising him in the days before the 2020 and 2024 elections.

Norris has five surviving children. They are stunt performers Mike and Eric with his late ex-wife Dianne Holechek, twins Dakota and Danilee with his wife Gena Norris, and Dina, the result of an early 1960s "one-night stand" revealed in his autobiography. *—PTI*

Kim & daughter drive tank during military drill

SEOUL, 20 MARCH

North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un's teenage daughter drove a tank during army training supervised by her father, their public appearance prompts speculation she may be groomed as Kim's heir.

Korean Central News reported on Friday that Kim oversaw an offensive tactical drill involving tank units and infantry troops the day before, emphasising the need to complete war preparations. State media showed Kim's daughter, reportedly named Kim Ju Ae and around 13, sticking her head out of the driver's hatch of a moving tank, with her smiling father nearby. Experts

say she was driving the tank, her first such activity, though modern tanks are relatively easy to operate.

The girl has joined her father to events since 2022, and North Korean media describes her as Kim Jong Un's "most beloved" or child. The training coincided with US and South Korean military exercises, viewed by North Korea as invasion rehearsals. *—PTI*

— TATA

Tata unveils India's 1st scrap-based electric furnace

MUMBAI, 20 MARCH

Tata Steel has inaugurated its first scrap-based Electric Arc Furnace (EAF) at Hi-Tech Valley, Ludhiana, marking a historic milestone in sustainable steelmaking. Built with an investment of approximately Rs 3,200 crore, the plant has a capacity of 0.75 million tonnes annually and aims for CO2 emissions below 0.3 tonnes per tonne of steel, supporting Tata Steel's goal to achieve Net Zero emissions by 2045. Attended by Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann, Tata Steel Chairman N Chandrasekaran, and CEO TV Narendran, the plant will use 100 per cent steel scrap, sourcing 40 per cent from Rohtak. It will produce construction-grade rebar under 'Tata Tiscon', showcasing Tata Steel's commitment to a greener, resilient future. —*ANI*

Core sector growth hits three-month low of 2.3% in Feb

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

Production growth in eight core infrastructure sectors slowed to a three-month low of 2.3 per cent in February due to contraction in crude oil, natural gas and refinery products. Government data showed these sectors had expanded by 3.4 per cent in the same month last year. Growth in fertiliser, cement and electricity output declined to 3.4 per cent, 9.3 per cent and 0.5 per cent respectively, while coal and steel recorded healthy growth. During April-February, cumulative growth stood at 2.9 per cent compared with 4.4 per cent a year earlier. Aditi Nayar said growth had slowed even before the West Asia crisis and warned, "The longer that the crisis persists... downside will be for India's GDP growth."—*PTI*

Centre blocks 300 illegal gambling platforms

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

In a crackdown on illegal gambling and betting websites, the government has blocked 300 websites and applications, sources said. These include online sports betting platforms, casino games, betting exchanges, and satta or matka networks. Overall, about 8,400 such platforms have been blocked so far, with nearly 4,900 taken down after the Online Gaming Act. The law prohibits all online money games, including games of chance and skill, along with their advertising and financial transactions. Violations can attract imprisonment up to three years or fines up to Rs 1 crore. Repeat offences carry stricter penalties. The Act also provides for an Online Gaming Authority to regulate permissible games and address grievances. —*PTI*

RBI to hold ₹1L cr repo auction on 23 March

MUMBAI, 20 MARCH

The Reserve Bank of India on Friday said it will conduct an overnight variable rate repo (VRR) auction of Rs 1 lakh crore on 23 March. The auction will take place between 9.30 am and 10.00 am on 23 March, and the reversal of these funds will take place on 24 March, as per the central bank's release. The central bank announced the auction based on the current and evolving liquidity conditions of the banking system, the release added. Currently, the liquidity in the banking system is estimated to be in surplus of around Rs 16,875.36 crore. Earlier today, the central bank infused Rs 25,101 crore transient liquidity in the banking system through a three-day VRR auction. On 17 March, the central bank injected Rs 48,014 crore liquidity into the banking system via a seven-day VRR. —*PTI*

Rupee in free fall, hits new low of 93.53 against USD

Rupee is under tremendous pressure as crude prices surge

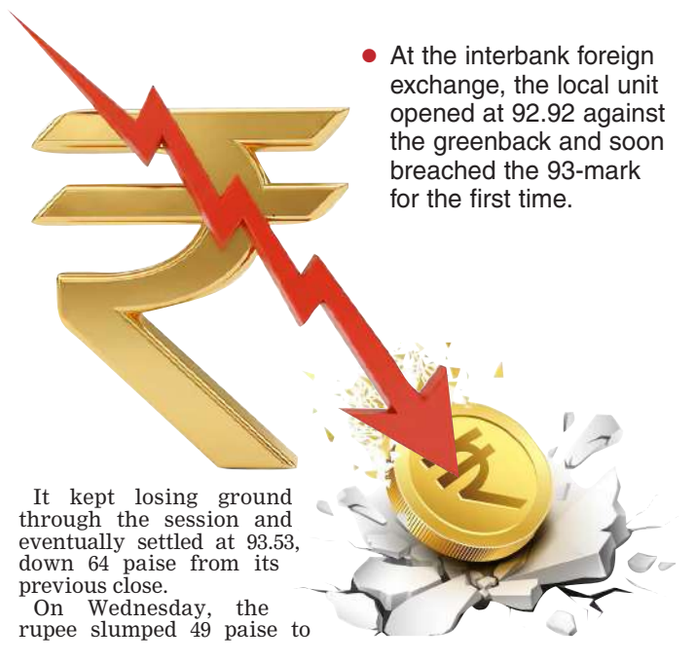
MUMBAI, 20 MARCH

The rupee crashed 64 paise to settle at an all-time low of 93.53 against the US dollar on Friday, weighed down by persistent foreign fund outflows and a steep rise in crude oil prices amid mounting geopolitical tensions.

Forex traders said the Indian rupee is under tremendous pressure as surging crude oil prices and a shift toward risk-aversion dented investor sentiments.

Moreover, heightened geopolitical uncertainty risks are driving energy costs higher, which could widen the trade deficit and stoke inflationary pressures, they added.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 92.92 against the greenback and soon breached the 93-mark for the first time.



- At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 92.92 against the greenback and soon breached the 93-mark for the first time.

It kept losing ground through the session and eventually settled at 93.53, down 64 paise from its previous close.

On Wednesday, the rupee slumped 49 paise to close at its previous record low of 92.89 against the US dollar.

Forex markets were closed on Thursday on account of Gudhi Padwa.

"The rupee hit fresh all-time lows on Friday amid geopolitical tensions in West Asia and FII outflows. Rising global crude oil prices, too, have pressured the rupee," Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Commodities Research, Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said.

All key central banks left interest rates unchanged in their respective monetary policy meetings, citing inflation concerns and said they stand ready to steer monetary policy accordingly, he said.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.35 per cent higher at 99.58. —*PTI*

Sensex climbs 325pts, Nifty jumps to 23,000

MUMBAI, 20 MARCH

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty gave up most of their intra-day gains to end nearly half a per cent higher on Friday, following intense buying in PSU bank, IT and metal stocks amid concerns over a further spike in fuel-driven inflation.

In another volatile session, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 325.72 points or 0.44 per cent to settle at 74,532.96. During the day, it jumped 1,079.15 points, or 1.45 per cent, to 75,286.39.

The 50-share NSE Nifty edged higher by 112.35 points, or 0.49 per cent, to end at 23,114.50. Intra-day, it jumped 343 points, or 1.49 per cent, to 23,345.15.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Tata Steel, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, Trent, Reliance Industries, Titan, NTPC and Sun Pharma were among the major gainers. HDFC Bank, Bharat Electronics, Kotak Mahindra Bank & ICICI Bank were among the laggards.

The BSE MidCap Select index climbed 0.97 per cent, while SmallCap Select index declined 0.32 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, BSE PSU Bank jumped 2.19 per cent, Focused IT (2.18 per cent), IT (2.08 per cent), healthcare (1.45 per cent), metal (1.41 per cent) and energy (1.03 per cent). However, financial services, Private Banks index, BSE Top 10 Banks, realty and BSE MidSmall Private Banks Quality Tilt were the laggards.

A total of 2,458 stocks advanced, while 1,804 declined and 170 remained unchanged on the BSE.

On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark dipped 30.96 points or 0.04 per cent, the Nifty slipped 36.6 points or 0.15 per cent. —*PTI*

HOW MARKETS PERFORMED

DOW US	45,858.13	(0.40%)
S&P 500 US	6,582.60	(0.68%)
Nasdaq US	21,865.01	(1.02%)
Nikkei JAPAN	53,372.53	(3.38%)
Hang Seng CHINA	25,277.33	(0.88%)
DAX GERMANY	22,474.81	(1.60%)
FTSE 100 UK	9,951.14	(1.12%)
CAC 40 PARIS	7,672.97	(1.73%)
KOKSPI SOUTH KOREA	5,781.20	(0.31%)

Crude oil prices decline by Rs 190 to Rs 8,808/barrel

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

Crude oil prices declined by Rs 190 to Rs 8,808 per barrel in futures trade on Friday as traders weighed the prospects of additional Iranian supply despite lingering geopolitical tensions in West Asia.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange, crude oil for the April delivery ended its three-day rally, declining by Rs 190, or 2.11 per cent, to Rs 8,808 per barrel in a business turnover of 18,781 lots.

Analysts said the fall in oil prices was driven by hopes of softening geopolitical risk premium following indications of a more pragmatic approach by the US towards Iranian crude supplies.

In the overseas trade, West Texas Intermediate (WTI) futures for May delivery fell USD 1.85, or nearly 2 per cent, to USD 93.70 per barrel, while Brent Oil for the same month contract slipped 0.34 per cent to trade at USD 108.28 per barrel in New York.

The dip in crude prices, now around USD 107 per barrel for Brent against a peak of USD 119, reflects a 'relief valve' moment, though tensions remain high, Aamir Makda, Commodity & Currency Analyst at Choice Broking, said. On the outlook, Makda said Crude oil prices would remain cautiously bearish in the near term, with Brent expected to trade in the range of USD 90 to 115 per barrel as additional supply potentially enters the market.

According to reports, oil prices could soar past USD 180 per barrel if supply disruptions stemming from the US-Israel war on Iran last beyond April. —*PTI*

IEA suggests less travel, curbs to ease oil shock

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

To mitigate economic fallout from the West Asia war on the oil market, the International Energy Agency (IEA) says supply-side actions alone cannot offset the scale of such disruptions, so it has identified 10 rapid-response measures for governments, businesses, and households.

In its latest report, the IEA recommends reducing highway speed limits by at least 10 km/h, switching to electric cooking instead of LPG, avoiding air travel and increasing car sharing.

According to the report, restoring transit through the Strait of Hormuz remains essential to stabilise global energy markets.

An estimated 20 million barrels per day pass through the Strait; disruptions have tightened markets, pushing crude above USD 100 per barrel and sharply raising prices of diesel, jet fuel, and LPG. —*PTI*

Silver prices jump, gold falls to ₹1.52L/10g

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

Silver prices rebounded by Rs 1,800 to Rs 2.40 lakh per kg while gold prices dropped by Rs 650 to Rs 1.52 lakh per 10g in the national capital on Friday, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The white metal prices increased by Rs 1,800, or nearly 1 per cent, to Rs 2,40,500 per kg (inclusive of all taxes) from Thursday's closing level of Rs 2,38,700 per kg.

However, gold of 99.9 per cent purity extended its losses for the third consecutive day, declining by Rs 650, or 0.42 per cent, to Rs 1,52,650 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes).

The yellow metal had settled at Rs 1,53,300 per 10g in the previous session.

Analysts said gold prices remain under pressure due to macroeconomic uncertainties and global cues favouring the US dollar.

"The precious metal complex continues to face stiff headwinds from the ongoing US-Israel-Iran conflict, which has moved capital into the haven dollar and crude oil," Dilip Parmar, Senior Research Analyst, HDFC Securities, said.

In the international market, spot silver slipped nearly 1 per cent to trade at USD 72.18 per ounce, while gold was trading 0.27 per cent higher at USD 4,663.54 per ounce.

On the outlook, gold is likely to remain weak with heightened volatility in the near term, Trivedi said. —*PTI*

Govt invites bids for rare earth magnet mfg

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The government on Friday invited bids to set up manufacturing facilities for 6,000 metric tonnes per annum (MTPA) of magnets, as part of the Rs 7,280-crore Scheme to Promote Manufacturing of Sintered Rare Earth Permanent Magnet (REPM).

A request for proposal has been issued for the selection of beneficiaries needed to establish integrated NdFeB manufacturing units.

Under the scheme, selected beneficiaries will be eligible for capital subsidies and sales incentives. Each beneficiary will be allocated capacity ranging between 600 MTPA and 1,200 MTPA in multiples of 100 MTPA.

The online bidding process will be conducted through the Central Public Procurement (CPP) portal in a two-stage Least Cost System (LCS) comprising technical and financial bids. A pre-bid conference is scheduled for 7 April, followed by a bid submission deadline on 28 May. —*PTI*

New I-T rules effective from 1 April

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

On Friday, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) notified the rules of the Income-tax Act, 2025. The Income-tax Rules, 2026, will operationalise the simplified direct tax legislation, which was approved by Parliament last year and will come into effect from 1 April.

In 2025, Parliament passed a new Income Tax Bill to replace the six-decade-old Income Tax Act, 1961. It does not impose any new tax rate and only simplifies the language.

The Act has removed both redundant provisions and archaic language and further reduced the number of Sections from 819 in the Income Tax Act of 1961 to 536 and the number of chapters from 47 to 23.

While the new rules provide enhanced House Rent Allowance (HRA) benefits for salaried employees, they also make the disclosure of the landlord-tenant relationship mandatory.

Under the new rules, eight cities — Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad, Pune, Ahmedabad, and Bengaluru — will qualify for an exemption limit of 50 per cent of salary, while others will continue at 40 per cent. —*PTI*

HDFC Bank shares slide after chairman's resignation

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The Shares of HDFC Bank continued to fall on Friday, declining over 2 per cent, after its non-executive chairman Atanu Chakraborty abruptly resigned, citing differences over "values and ethics".

The blue-chip stock dropped 2.36 per cent to Rs 780.75 on the BSE. At the NSE, it edged lower by 2.19 per cent to Rs 780.70.

Shares of HDFC Bank dived over 5 per cent on Thursday.

HDFC Bank's non-executive chairman Atanu Chakraborty abruptly resigned, citing differences over "values and ethics" — a ground that the management of the country's second-largest lender said was baffling, as the former bureaucrat offered no specific instance despite repeated requests. —*PTI*

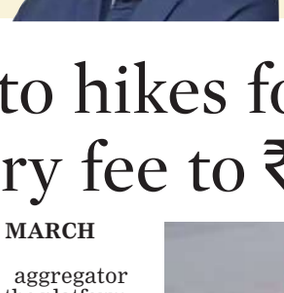
Flipkart CFO steps down, Verman returns as SVP

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

E-commerce major Flipkart on Friday announced that its Group Chief Financial Officer (CFO) **Sriram Venkataraman** will step down from his role.

The company said Venkataraman will remain for a period of time to ensure continuity and facilitate a smooth transition within the organisation.

During the interim phase, Ravi Iyer, CFO of Flipkart, will oversee the broader finance organisation, according to a company statement. The development comes alongside another senior-level change, with Nishant Verman rejoining the Walmart-backed firm as Senior Vice President (SVP) for Corporate Development and Partnerships.



Verman returns after his entrepreneurial stint at Bzaar, a cross-border exports platform. He has previously worked with Microsoft's Corporate Development team and held roles in technology investment banking at Morgan Stanley.

Established in 2007, the Flipkart Group comprises multiple businesses. —*PTI*

REAL IMAGES BEING MORPHED

Teens sue xAI over explicit image creation

NASHVILLE, 20 MARCH

Three teenagers in Tennessee sued **Elon Musk**'s xAI this week, claiming the company's image-generation tools were used to morph real photos of them into explicitly sexual images.

The high school students, who are seeking to proceed under pseudonyms, filed the lawsuit in California, where xAI — Musk's artificial intelligence company — has its headquarters. They are seeking class-action status to represent what the lawsuit says are thousands of victims like themselves who either are minors or were minors when sexually explicit images of them were created.

According to the lawsuit, Jane Doe was alerted anonymously in December that someone was distributing sexually explicit images of her on a social media website.

Other AI firms have banned their image-generators from making any sexually explicit content, while Elon Musk saw it as a business opportunity —*x*

"At least five of these files, one video and four images, depicted her actual face and body in settings with which she was familiar, but morphed into sexually explicit poses," the lawsuit states.

One of the images was taken from a homecoming photo. Another was taken from a high school yearbook.

The person distributing the images also created explicit images of at least 18 other girls, two of whom are co-plaintiffs in the lawsuit. In late December, local police arrested the perpetrator and confiscated his phone. They found that he had uploaded the images to several platforms where he traded them for sexually explicit images of other minors.

Other AI companies have prohibited their image-generators from producing any sexually explicit content, even of adults. Musk saw this as a business and promoted the ability of xAI's Grok chatbot to create "spicy" content, the lawsuit claims. —*PTI*

Zomato hikes food delivery fee to ₹14.90

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

Food delivery aggregator Zomato has hiked the platform fee it charges users by Rs 2.40 to Rs 14.90 per order, its app showed on Friday.

Zomato's platform fee now stands at Rs 14.90 on a pre-GST basis, from Rs 12.50 earlier. Rival Swiggy has been charging a platform Rs 14.99 inclusive of GST from users.

According to people in the know, the hike in platform fee is on a pan-India basis in all markets where Zomato operates. It had last hiked its platform fee in September 2025.

Meanwhile, magicpin, the third-largest food delivery player, which currently charges a platform fee of Rs 14.20 per order, ruled out a hike at least for the time being.

Anshoo Sharma, CEO & Founder, magicpin, said, "At a time when the food delivery ecosystem is navigating a tough phase with rising costs, we have consciously decided not to increase our platform fee to support our restaurant partners and keep food delivery accessible for customers".

— ANI

The latest hike in platform fees by Zomato comes at a time when crude oil prices are rising due to the West Asia conflict. —*PTI*

-PTI

Harshit Rana ruled out of IPL 2026

KOLKATA, 20 MARCH

In a big blow to Kolkata Knight Riders, pacer Harshit Rana was on Friday ruled out of the entire IPL 2026 owing to the ligament injury that he sustained during a warm-up match ahead of the recent T20 World Cup. The fast bowler suffered a ligament strain in his right knee during India's T20 World Cup warm-up game against South Africa, following which he underwent surgery, needing an extensive rehabilitation process. "It is a big blow because Harshit Rana has been an integral part of this team for the last couple of seasons, also the championship season. Over the last year, he's really grown as a cricketer," KKR head coach Nayar said, without giving a confirmed timeline for Rana's return.—*PTI*

Snooker great Ronnie O'Sullivan makes history

YUSHAN, 20 MARCH

Seven-time world champion Ronnie O'Sullivan made professional snooker history on Friday by crafting the highest break ever of 153 at the World Open in China. The 50-year-old Englishman pulled off the feat against Ryan Day of Wales on his way to sealing his place in the semifinals in Yushan with a dominant 5-0 victory. O'Sullivan, regarded as the best player snooker has ever produced, was aided by a free ball and started his break with the green, followed by an opening black. He then reeled off the 15 reds, complemented by 13 further blacks and two pinks, before nonchalantly clearing up the colours to nail the eye-popping record.—*PTI*

India U-20 women's team arrives in Thailand

THAILAND, 20 MARCH

The Indian U-20 women's team, with 24 players, arrived in Thailand on Friday morning, 20 March, 2026, for the AFC U-20 Women's Asian Cup. The Young Tigresses, who qualified for the Asian Cup after 20 years, will have 13 days to acclimatise to the local conditions in Bangkok before their first Group C match against Japan on April 2 at 18:30 IST. India will then take on Australia on April 5 at 14:30 IST and Chinese Taipei on April 8 at 14:30 IST. The AFC U-20 Women's Asian Cup Thailand 2026 will be streamed live on FanCode. The top two teams in the group and the two best third-placed teams among all three groups will make it to the quarter-finals. Further.—*PTI*

-PTI

Swiatek stunned in second round of Miami Open

MIAMI, 20 MARCH

Iga Swiatek crashed out of the Miami Open second round Thursday as 50th-ranked fellow Pole Magda Linette fought back for a 1-6, 7-5, 6-3 victory over the six-time Grand Slam champion. Reigning Wimbledon champion Swiatek, who won the Miami Open in 2022, suffered her first opening loss at a tournament since the 2021 WTA Finals. It's just the latest disappointment for Swiatek, who was eliminated in the quarter-finals at the Australian Open and in the WTA 1000 events in Doha and Indian Wells.Although she was seeded second in the elite combined ATP and WTA hardcourt tournament in Miami, Swiatek dropped this week to third in the world as Indian Wells finalist Elena Rybakina moved up behind top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka.—*PTI*

Selectors to track ODI WC probables in IPL

BCCI is looking at each selector watching at least one game per week

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The ODI World Cup is still a year away, but India's 20-odd probables have already been earmarked, and the five national selectors will keep an eye on these players during the IPL starting 28 March, a top BCCI source told PTI on Friday.

The Ajit Agarakar-led panel comprises SS Das, RP Singh, Ajay Ratra and Pragyan Ojha. The World Cup is to be co-hosted by South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Namibia in October and November of 2027.

The panel members are expected to be present for matches at their respective bases while tracking the other games on TV. IPL begins with defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru taking on Sunrisers Hyderabad in Bengaluru.

The senior official also rejected speculation that Agarkar has sought an extension till the 50-over World Cup after a triumphant T20 World Cup campaign earlier this year.

"The selection panel is a sub-committee of the BCCI and the selectors' contract runs till September this year," a senior BCCI official privy to developments told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

"Ajit's contract ends in September, and after that, the BCCI secretary and Ajit will have to decide whether he will continue till next year's ODI World Cup. A senior selector can continue up to four years as per the constitution, and he doesn't need to seek an extension," he said.

Agarkar took over as chairman of selectors in July 2023 and has been a central figure during the transitions endured by the Test and T20 squads following the retirements of stalwarts Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma from these two formats.

The BCCI is looking at each selector watching at least one game per week, which covers five games per week from the venue. —*PTI*

-PTI

TATA IPL 2026

SAM CURRAN SET TO MISS IPL

Sam Curran, England's charismatic all-rounder, is set to miss the upcoming Indian Premier League season for Rajasthan Royals due to a suspected groin injury, with the franchise exploring replacement options. Curran, who was part of England's T20 World Cup side that recently lost to India in the semifinals, was traded by Chennai Super Kings to Rajasthan Royals last year along with Ravindra Jadeja in exchange for India wicketkeeper-batter Sanju Samson.However, the 27-year-old all-rounder, who has previously represented Punjab Kings and Chennai Super Kings, and was the most expensive buy ahead of the 2023 Indian Premier League season at Rs 18.5 crore, has been sidelined by injury. Curran, who played for Chennai Super Kings in 2020 and 2021 and rejoined the side ahead of last season for Rs 2.4 crore, finished the 2025 campaign with 114 runs and one wicket in five matches for the Chennai franchise.

CUMMINS, STARC, AND JOSH TO MISS START OF IPL

MUMBAI, 20 MARCH

Four leading Australian pacers, including Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, and Josh Hazlewood, are set to miss the start of the upcoming Indian Premier League season later this month, dealing an early setback to their respective franchises.

According to a report on cricket.com.au, Starc, Cummins, and Hazlewood will miss at least the start of IPL, while Nathan Ellis is set to be ruled out of the tournament completely.

The report said Cricket Australia (CA) is taking a cautious approach with its pacers ahead of a busy schedule from August that includes 21 Test matches in 12 months.

Cummins is the captain of Sunrisers Hyderabad, while Starc plays for Delhi Capitals and Hazlewood for Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

Australia will tour South Africa, India, and England before defending the ODI World Cup title in 2027.

"The trio's availability will depend on progress in their return to play protocols over the next few weeks," the report said.

Test captain Cummins has featured in only one Test last summer due to a back stress injury, while Hazlewood missed the entire series due to hamstring and Achilles issues.

The duo also missed the T20 World Cup.

Starc played all five Ashes Tests and the back-end of the Big Bash League, but not the T20 World Cup, as he has retired from the format.

—*PTI*

TANVI UPSETS NIDAIRA TO STORM INTO SEMIS AT ORLEANS MASTERS

ORLEANS, 20 MARCH

India's Tanvi Sharma stunned Japan's sixth seed Natsuki Nidaira in straight games to storm into the semifinals of the USD 250,000 Orleans Masters Super 300 badminton tournament here on Friday.

The 17-year-old, who is a silver medallist at the BWF World Junior Championships, registered a 21-14, 21-14 in 43 minutes in the women's singles quarterfinals.

Tanvi, who is the youngest Indian to reach a BWF World Tour final at the 2025 US Open Super 300, will take on either former world champion Nozomi Okuhara of Japan or Vietnam's Nguyen Thuy Linh next.In the men's doubles quarterfinals, Leo Carnando and Bagas Maulana of Indonesia ended the campaign of Hariharan Amsakarunan and MR Arjun with a 21-12, 22-20 win.

Later in the day, Isharani Baruah and Malvika Bansod will lock horns in an all-Indian quarterfinal clash.

In the men's doubles quarterfinals, Leo Carnando and Bagas Maulana of Indonesia ended the campaign of Hariharan Amsakarunan and MR Arjun with a 21-12, 22-20 win.Later in the day, Isharani Baruah and Malvika Bansod will lock horns in an all-Indian quarterfinal clash. —*PTI*

L Sivaramakrishnan quits commentary, blames BCCI for colour discrimination

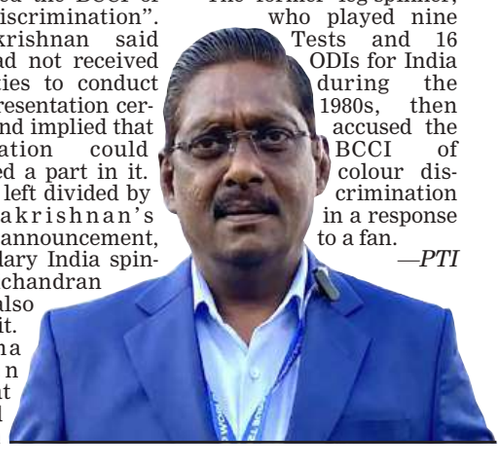
CHENNAI, 20 MARCH

Former India cricketer Laxman Sivarama krishnan announced his retirement from the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) commentary panel on Friday. Not only did Sivaramakrishnan refer to a lack of opportunities as a driving force behind his decision, but he also accused the BCCI of "colour discrimination". Sivaramakrishnan said that he had not received opportunities to conduct toss and presentation ceremonies, and implied that discrimination could have played a part in it. Fans were left divided by Sivaramakrishnan's explosive announcement, and legendary India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin also reacted to it.

Sivarama krishnan stated that he had been usurped for certain roles by "newcomers" in the industry.

"If I have not been used for TOSSES and PRESENTATION for 23 years and newcomers come in to do pitch report, tosses, presentations even when (Ravi) Shastri was coaching, what do you think could be the reason?" he posted.

The former leg-spinner, who played nine Tests and 16 ODIs for India during the 1980s, then accused the BCCI of colour discrimination in a response to a fan. —*PTI*



NZ LEAD SERIES 2-1

Latham shines as New Zealand beat South Africa in 3rd T20

AUCKLAND, 20 MARCH

Tom Latham carried his bat for 63 and put on 96 for the first wicket with Devon Conway to set up New Zealand's eight-wicket win over South Africa in their third Twenty20 on Friday.

Conway made 39, and Latham reached his fourth T20 half-century, helping New Zealand's cricketers pass South Africa's 136-9 with 22 balls remaining to take a 2-1 lead in the five-match series.

Batting conditions have been tricky, and matches in the series have been low-scoring. South Africa won the first by seven wickets, chasing down New Zealand's 91, and the Black Caps won the second by 68 runs, bowling out the opposition for 107.

South Africa batted out 20 overs for the first time on Friday, helped by a lively, unbeaten 26 from 20 balls by Nqobani Mokoena in his first international innings.

Latham and Conway began their run chase quietly, taking five runs from the first two overs and 12 from the first three. They then took 14 from the fourth over, bowled by Mokoena, and 21 from the fifth by Lutho Sipamla to set New Zealand on the way to a comfortable win.Conway fell in the 11th over, caught in the deep by Rubin Hermann off Keshav Maharaj, and Tim Robinson was out for 17 in the 17th over when the scores were tied. Nick Kelly came out and hit a single for the winning run from the next ball."You look at the depth we've got at the moment... with a few guys away," said New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner, who won the toss and sent South Africa in to bat."It was a simple blueprint tonight. The pitch looked like it was a little bit early. It looked tricky, and it was good that the two boys (Conway and Latham) could soak that up. You go too hard, and you lose a couple of wickets, which makes the chase a little bit challenging.

New Zealand 137 for 2 (Latham 63*, Conway 39) beat South Africa 136 for 9 (Santner 2-21, Sears 2-27, Jamieson 2-42) by eight wickets. —*PTI*

Kazakhstan hockey team trains in India for Asian triumph

NEW DELHI, 20 MARCH

The Kazakhstan senior men's hockey team is currently in India for a high-performance training camp at the Sports Authority of India's Northern Regional Centre, Sonipat, Haryana, from 10 to 21 March as part of its preparations for the upcoming Asian Games Qualifiers.

The camp, held at one of India's premier hockey training centres, offers world-class synthetic turf, advanced conditioning facilities, and an intensely competitive environment, providing Kazakhstan an ideal platform to fine-tune their skills ahead of the crucial continental assignment.

The Kazakhstan hockey team poses for a picture PHOTO: PTI

This initiative aligns with the vision of the Sports Ministry and the Sports Authority of India to position the country as a global hub for sporting excellence by hosting and supporting international teams.

It also reflects the principles of the Olympic movement, promoting cross-border collaboration and athlete development.

"We are very pleased to be here at the Sports Authority of India Northern Regional Centre, Sonipat, which has been extremely hospitable to our team. Overall, India offers a very high standard of hockey, and that is exactly why we chose to come here — to learn, adapt, and grow.

"This is our second visit to India after competing in Rajgir, Bihar, during the Hero Asia Cup 2025, and once again, the experience has been invaluable," said Kazakhstan coach Olga Urmanova in a HI statement.

"We have already played several friendly matches against local teams here in SAI Sonipat, and the level of competition has been very high, which is exactly what we need at this stage of our preparation." —*PTI*

FULFILL WORLD CUP SCHEDULE

FIFA fines Israel, denies key Palestinian complaint

GENEVA, 20 MARCH

FIFA fined the Israeli soccer federation for breaching anti-discrimination regulations but took no action on a Palestinian request to suspend Israel from global soccer for allowing clubs based in West Bank settlements. Also, FIFA President Gianni Infantino on Thursday further dampened Iran's attempts to move its World Cup matches from the United States to Mexico, saying global soccer's governing body wants the tournament "to go ahead as scheduled.

"Two separate Palestinian soccer federation petitions were addressed in Thursday's announcement.FIFA fined the Israel Football Association 150,000 Swiss francs (USD 190,000) on disciplinary charges relating to "discrimination and racist abuse," plus "offensive behaviour and violations of the principles of fair play.

Infantino gets a 33 per cent bonus after Club World Cup

FIFA president Gianni Infantino received a 33 per cent increase in his annual bonus last year as part of an $A8.6 million pay package detailed by soccer's world body on Thursday.

Infantino's basic annual salary was unchanged at 2.6 million Swiss francs ($A4.6m), and his bonus rose by 550,000 Swiss francs to 2.2 million Swiss francs ($A4 m) in 2025, when FIFA organised its first month-long men's Club World Cup in the US. —*PTI*

FIFA rules women's teams must have female coaches

Every team in FIFA's women's football tournaments must include at least one female head coach or assistant coach following the introduction of new regulations. The requirements will come into effect during the under-17s and under-20s Women's World Cup and Women's Champions Cup competitions this year. The decision was made at the FIFA Council on Thursday, and discussed the long-term strategy of female representation in coaching. Under the new ruling, at least two staff members on the bench of every team at matches must be female, with one in an assistant coach or head coach role. The rule applies to all youth and senior tournaments, including clubs and national teams.